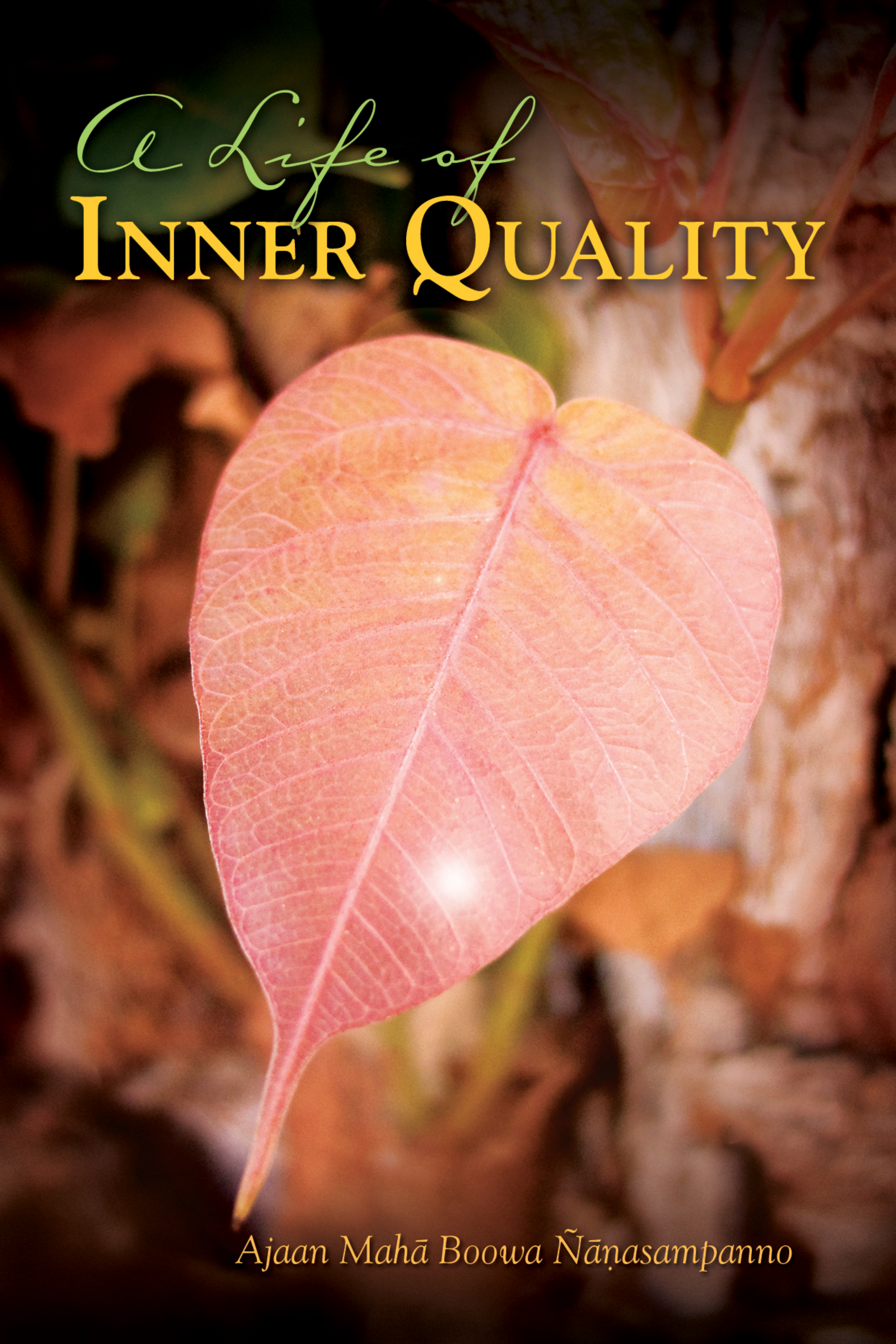
A Life of Inner Quality



Ajaan Mahā Boowa Ñāṇasampanno

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Translated by *Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu*

A Forest Dhamma Publication
Virginia – USA

ISBN: 978-1-5323-0078-3

Cover and Interior Design by Mae Chee Melita Halim.
Set in Goudy Oldstyle Std and JaguarJC.

“The Gift of Dhamma
Excels All Other Gifts”

—*The Lord Buddha*

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Introduction

This is a guide for integrating Buddhist practice into daily life, drawn from talks that Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa has given over the past 25 years to various groups of lay people—students, civil servants, those new to the practice and those more experienced. In each case he has adapted his style and strategy to suit the needs of his listeners. Some of the references made in the talks were very specific to the time, place and culture of the audience present for the talks. This point is worth bearing in mind as you read these talks.

Although most of the talks emphasize the more basic levels of the practice—levels frequently overlooked—they cover all levels, for as the Venerable Ācariya says in the concluding talk, all are mutually reinforcing. The higher levels must build on habits and attitudes developed on the more basic levels, while the basic levels need reference to the higher levels so as not to become misguided or pointless.

Because this is an introductory book, terms in Pāli—the language of the oldest Buddhist Canon—are used as little as possible. Some basic Pāli terms, though, have no real equivalents in English, so I have had no choice but to leave them as they are wherever they appear in the talks. If they are new to you, please refer to the glossary at the back of the book.

If you are interested in more detailed instructions on meditation, I recommend that you read the essay, "Wisdom Develops Samādhi"—which is part of the book *Forest Dhamma*—and then any of the Venerable Ācariya's other books, all of which build around that essay.

As for this book, I hope you find it helpful and encouraging in developing in your own life the inner quality we each have latent within us.

Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu
Rayong, June, 1989

Note: For this edition, fragments of a talk entitled, "Nibbāna is Nibbāna" have been added to this collection to make it more complete.

May, 2012

Noble Truths *of* Family Life, Noble Truths *of* the Heart

People often say that the way Buddhism teaches constantly about the suffering of living beings is unpleasant to them and makes them so depressed that they get no joy out of listening to the Dhamma. They feel as if the suffering and stress being talked about were joining forces with the suffering and stress already inside them, making them despondent and sad. If that weren't enough, the basic principles of the Buddha's teaching—the four Noble Truths *(ariya sacca)*—start out with suffering as their primary theme, because that's what the religion teaches about far more than anything else. It's as if the Buddha were driving away the people who, out of fear of suffering, come running to the Dhamma for shelter, so that instead they will run away from the Dhamma inasmuch as they don't want to sit and listen to anyone talking about suffering and stress.

Actually, when people say things like this, it shows that they haven't had enough training in the religion to understand its true aims. The fact that the religion teaches about suffering is com-

pletely in line with the way things are. This is in keeping with the name, 'Noble Truths.' These truths are the religion's basic principles. They're true. The Buddha was a person who truly knew. This is why he was able to point out the lacks and deficiencies in living beings—for the suffering we experience all have deficiencies as their basic cause.

Say, for instance, that the body has a painful disease. This shows that there's a deficiency in it. If every part of the body were perfectly fit and healthy, there'd be no way for pain and suffering to arise. You can see this from the people with their various ailments who come pouring into hospitals for examination and treatment. All of them without exception have deficiencies in their bodies. They're not fully healthy at all. When the doctors make examinations and prescribe medicine, they're examining to find the deficiencies in their patients and prescribing medicine to make up for them. If the medicine is right for the illness, the symptoms subside and the patient begins to feel better. The disease, if it gets the proper treatment, goes away. The suffering stops, and that's the end of the matter.

The Buddha was wise, which is why he taught us not to treat stress and suffering—which are effects—but to treat the causes, the deficiencies that bring them about. These deficiencies are called *samudaya,* which means 'origin of suffering.' When the causes are stopped, the effects stop too, of their own accord. The fact that the Buddha starts out with suffering before anything else is simply to point out the evidence that establishes the truth, so that we can search out the cause and correct it in the proper way—in the same way that police have to use stolen goods as their primary evidence in tracking down and capturing thieves.

Not working enough to supply the needs of one's family is one sure way to cause trouble and suffering within the family circle. This same truth holds for people as well as all other living beings—if their

needs are fully met there's a minimum of suffering in their families. If their needs aren't fully met, then even husbands and wives who love each other deeply can come to hate each other intensely and split apart.

This can come from deficiencies in making one's living and in other areas as well. Suffering thus arises in the family because the family income may be insufficient to provide for its needs, or one of the family members may have no sense of enough in the area of sexual desire. These sorts of deficiencies can arise because of a lack of intelligence in making one's living: poor health; chronic laziness and ignorance, coupled with the extravagance of spending money beyond one's means; overwhelming sexual desires that make one forget one's family and responsibilities. These are just a few of the possible outcomes.

These sorts of deficiencies are termed *samudaya,* the origins of suffering. Wherever any of these deficiencies becomes pronounced, the suffering that follows is also pronounced. Wherever we're deficient, that's where suffering will follow. This is why the Buddha taught us not to be lazy and wasteful, but to be hardworking and persistent, to save our earnings and spend them only for things that are necessary so that we can know how to avoid suffering. He also taught us how to wipe out that cause of suffering in the family that stems from laziness by using the path of firm commitment in making a living, so that we can reach the cessation of suffering in the family, in society, and so on. This is so that every family and social community will be able to meet with happiness.

He didn't teach us to sit around letting our feet and hands atrophy from not figuring out what sort of work to do, or to lie around embracing our suffering because we have nothing to eat or use. He didn't teach us to sit, stuck in suffering without finding a way out. Instead, all of the Noble Truths he taught were meant to free living

beings from their suffering. There's not a single Noble Truth that teaches us to let our suffering bury us alive. The Buddha taught these truths both to monks and to lay people, although he used somewhat different approaches in line with the needs of his listeners. But in the final analysis, he taught the Noble Truths so that people would become wise enough to rid themselves of suffering, both on the external level—family, home, society, work—and on the internal level, the suffering that arises exclusively within the heart.

The obstacles that prevent us from keeping up with the rest of the world in providing for ourselves are actually caused by ideas we think are up-to-date, for—who knows?—'up-to-date' here may mean up-to-date in terms of the origin of suffering: that is, the view that we can get away with earning just a little and spending a lot. If instead we try to follow the path indicated by the Noble Truths, our earnings are sure to grow day by day, our behavior will know its proper bounds, our expenditures will fall more in line with our position, our tendency toward extravagance—our way of seeing every purchase as necessary—will start to have principles to keep it in check, and our income—whatever its amount—will have a chance to stop and rest with us for a while. We'll come to realize that our desire to keep up with others in terms of buying things is the way to disaster because it destroys both our external wealth and our good habits, which are a form of wealth far more important than any other wealth in the world. If our good habits get spoiled because of our lack of thought for the present and future, we'll never have a chance to make anything of ourselves at all.

People who don't overlook their good habits and who try to reform their minds so as to stay within the bounds of moral virtue—all that is noble and good—are sure to shine both now and in the future, because basic good habits are the basis of all wealth. Any form of wealth, if we want it to last, must depend on good basic

principles in the heart, steady principles that are not easily swayed by outside influences. If we have 'reason' in charge of ourselves and our belongings, we'll be safe from the kind of loss that comes from being deceived by others or fooled by ourselves. Being fooled by ourselves is something hard to detect, even though it happens to us all the time. We work hard with our own hands to save up a nest egg and then we ourselves are the ones who shatter it. Without a thought for what's proper we spend it all in line with those desires that overcome our hearts. Even just this much should be enough to make us realize that we've got ourselves thoroughly fooled.

So, when the religion teaches us to conduct ourselves in the right way to close off the opening that suffering has into our lives, it's the same sort of thing as when doctors explain diseases and medical treatment to their patients so that they'll conduct themselves in the right way to avoid illness. The Noble Truths teach us to be intelligent in running our lives. The fact that the religion teaches us to know the causes of happiness and suffering—plus how to eliminate what's bad and foster what's good—shows that it doesn't teach us to be negative or pessimistic, as some people believe.

For this reason, we should make sure that we know the true purpose of the Noble Truths, which form the heart of every level of the world and every step of the Dhamma. People who hope for progress should analyze the Noble Truths so as to put them into practice in line with their position in life, in order to prosper both now and in the future. It's never happened that the Noble Truths of the Buddha have ever led to failure or loss for those who put them into practice. On the contrary, those who make use of these truths have become fine examples for the rest of the world to follow.

What I've been talking about so far concerns the Noble Truths in general terms. You might call them the external Noble Truths, the Noble Truths of family life, or whatever seems right to you.

Now I'd like to explain the Noble Truths within. The Noble Truths on this level deal, for the most part, exclusively with the heart. People who put the external Noble Truths into practice in a full and proper way, to the point where they enjoy happiness on the level of family life, may still have some deficiencies within their hearts, because suffering of this sort can happen to anyone on any level in life—rich, poor, men, women, lay people, or ordained: no exceptions are made. If there's a deficiency in the heart, suffering is bound to find a way to arise, just as with the body. The deficiencies or insufficiencies of the heart are of three major sorts: *sensual craving, craving for becoming, and craving for no becoming.* Each of these three forms of craving is an origin for suffering because each of them acts as a weight on the heart.

The way to cure them is to train yourself in the Dhamma so as to nourish the heart and give it peace. If you don't allow the heart to drink enough of the nourishment of the Dhamma to meet its needs, it's bound to become thirsty and slip out to various other preoccupations in search of other things to drink. But the 'water' it finds in this way is, for the most part, like salt water. Once you drink it, you become more thirsty and have to drink more. As a result, your thirst will never be quenched.

The heart, thirsting for preoccupations that give rise to more craving, will never reach the land of enough, but instead will stay stuck in the land of hunger. The Buddha thus measured the thirst for this sort of water by saying, "There is no river equal to craving." This is the sort of water that causes harm to those who drink it, aggravating their thirst, making them want to keep drinking more. If we persist in drinking a lot of it for long periods of time, our intestines are going to corrode away for sure. If we can't find any medicine to cure ourselves of this syndrome, our character will be destroyed and we'll be sure to die.

Wise people have seen the harm of this sort of water, and so have taught us to avoid it and to search for various techniques to cut away at these three forms of craving. They teach us to train the heart with the Dhamma—the most tasteful and nourishing beverage for it—to make it give up its taste for salt water and take only the flavor of the Dhamma as its nourishment. When we train the heart with the Dhamma until it gives rise to a feeling of peace and contentment, that's the flavor of the Dhamma that nourishes and benefits the person who drinks it. The more we drink it, the more peace and contentment we'll feel.

At the same time, we'll create an expansive and cheerful world within the heart. We'll see animals as animals, people as people, evil as really evil, and good as really good. In other words, we'll be true to the principles of the Dhamma, without being under the influence of the hunger which causes someone to see dry leaves as fresh vegetables and so stuff a handful into his mouth—and then, once his hunger is gone, realizes the harm of his hunger in that it could make him go blind.

Thus, our desire for things that aren't worth desiring is termed the origin of suffering *(samudaya)*. Suffering is the harm that comes from this sort of desire. We torment ourselves to the point where our hearts can't stay still, for they're pressured into restlessness all the time. The path *(magga)* refers to techniques for cutting away at the three forms of craving step by step, while the cessation of suffering *(nirodha)* is the ending of suffering and stress within the heart through the power of our practice of the path.

Every activity that's noble and good—generosity, morality, and meditation—is a part of the path *(magga)* that kills off suffering and its origin within the heart. So if you want to put an end to suffering in your own heart, you should view these activities as necessary duties. Make them constant habits until your heart has them fully

developed. No one has put thorns in the way of the path to release from suffering. It's a path that people who look for release can follow in the purity of their hearts. And no one has put thorns in the land of those released from suffering. It's a delightful state, just like the heart with no more stress and suffering.

As for the question of suffering in the future—in this life or the next—don't overlook your heart that's suffering right now. The same is true with every level of happiness because this very heart is the only thing that will possess those forms of happiness in its various destinations.

This should be enough explanation for now of the Noble Truths within and the Noble Truths without. I ask that you put into practice whichever level of the Noble Truths you see is appropriate for you, so that you can benefit from them by ridding yourself of external suffering and the suffering exclusively within the heart. The Noble Truths are each person's property, inasmuch as each of us can suffer from deficiencies. If we use the Noble Truths to develop fully the areas where we see we're still lacking, then the result—happiness in full measure—is sure to come our way without partiality or prejudice, no matter who we are.

Gratitude

All of us sitting here—and this includes the adults as well as the children—should not forget that we each have a mother and father who gave us birth and have provided for our needs. When we were first born, we weren't even able to know whether we were human beings or what, so we had to depend on our parents to look after us. They cared for us from the time we were in the womb until we came out into the world, and from that point on they kept caring for us and watching over us. As soon as we were old enough to start our education, they sent us to school and provided for all our related needs. From the beginning of our schooling to the end, how much did it cost them? The books, pencils, paper, clothing, sports equipment, tuition, and all the other items too numerous to name—all of these things were a responsibility our parents had to shoulder.

When we came into the world, we came without a thing to our names. Even our own bodies and every aspect of our lives came from our parents and were watched over by them. They provided for our

growth and safety, teaching us to know all sorts of things. We ourselves had nothing to show off to them aside from our eating and playing and crying and whining and pestering them in various ways as we felt like it.

Children at this age are in the stage where they're really bothersome at all hours of the day. Their bodies may be small and very endearing, but the trouble they cause isn't small like their bodies at all. Everything that happens to us at this age is an enormous issue—until we get old enough to know what's what and start our education. Even then, we still can't help causing trouble for our parents over things like clothing and so on, but at least we begin to gain knowledge, starting with the ABC's and on through elementary school, high school, university, and graduate school, until we finally count as 'educated'. So, in keeping with the fact that we're educated, we shouldn't forget the kindness of our parents who cared and provided for us before anyone else in the world. And we shouldn't forget our teachers and other benefactors. We should always keep their kindness in mind—because everything we have in body and mind has come from the care, protection, and teachings of our parents and teachers.

Those who are ungrateful, who forget the help of their benefactors, those who are selfish and see only their own knowledge and abilities in the present without showing deference or consideration for their benefactors are a deadweight on the world and can find no real progress in life—like a dead tree standing with no fruits or leaves to give shade. So I ask that you each take care to remember not to be the sort of person who's like a dead tree of this sort. Otherwise, you'll be an object of disgust for all your good fellow human beings and will have no value to the day you die.

Let me stress once more that we have each come from our parents and have gained knowledge from our teachers. This is why we

shouldn't forget ourselves and think that we're smart and self-sufficient. Otherwise, when we make a slip and fall, we won't be able to pick up the pieces—the pieces of us—which is the worst sort of loss we can experience, especially now that the world is changing faster than anyone can keep up with, because of all sorts of strange and unnatural theories and ideas. If anyone were to come along and say that the world has gone crazy, he wouldn't be wrong, and we'd have to admire him for speaking the truth because things you wouldn't think were possible have come to pass.

I've been around a fairly long time now and I've come to see things in this present-day world that I've never seen before. Students, for example, will at the drop of a hat put their teachers in jail or drive them out of their jobs and create all sorts of havoc, stirring up trouble in places that used to be at peace. At first, they seem reasonable and admirable in their ideals, but as time passes they get carried away with themselves, lose sight of their parents and teachers, and forget that good adults do exist. If this keeps up, I'm afraid that young people carried away with theories of this sort will end up throwing their parents in jail on grounds of being old-fashioned, out-of-date, and an embarrassment to them in front of their friends.

This sort of thing can happen if we don't come to our senses and correct the situation right now. Don't let these 'modern' ideas bring about the end of the world—for the world these days is spinning toward… it's hard to say what. I'm afraid the knowledge we've gained will become a tool for cruelty and heartlessness, and we'll end up drowning in it. So I ask that you reflect on things carefully. Our nation and society are things of great value to us, so don't treat them as tools for your opinions, your urge for the excitement of action, or your desire for fame. If society breaks down, you'll have no way of restoring it.

Buddhism is absolutely right in teaching us the virtue that can prevent all these dangers—*the virtue of gratitude to our benefactors.* Who are our benefactors? To begin with, our parents, who have cared for us from the day of our birth all the way up to the present. There's no one else in this world who would dare make such sacrifices for us, who would love and show us such compassion as our parents. They are the ones whose kindnesses we should bear in mind more than those of anyone else—*and yet we hardly ever give them any thought.*

The fact that we hardly give them any thought is what can make us arrogant and ungrateful as we grow older. We tend to forget how, as children, we used to lord it over them. We forget that every child has held the power to order its parents around in every way in line with its whims, even in ways that aren't proper. Especially when the child is very young: that's when it's very powerful. The parents have to put up with so many hardships that you really feel sorry for them. They try everything they can to placate the child because of their love for it, because it's flesh of their own flesh, blood of their own blood. If it orders them to be birds, they have to be birds; if crows, they have to be crows, even though they aren't birds or crows at all. In other words, they have to run around in search of whatever it wants. Otherwise its shrill, small voice will fill the house.

Every child has been the lord of its parents, ordering them around as it likes. As it grows older, its position diminishes from lord to boss and then to supervisor. But as long as it's still very young, it holds sole absolute authority within the family. Whatever it demands has to come true. Otherwise, it'll cry until its eyes are on fire. So the parents have to scurry around to satisfy its wants. Every child holds the position of lord, boss, and supervisor in the family before its position finally works down to where it's tolerable. But never will it agree to come down to the same level with its parents. Until the

day it's parted from them by death, the child will always have to hold the reins of power.

There's no doubt that all of us here—all of you, and I myself—have held the position of lord of the family, boss of the family, supervisor of the family, and the old habits have stuck so that we continue to take advantage of our parents, even unintentionally, because the principles of nature among parents and their children create this sort of bond. This holds true for everyone all over the world.

So for the sake of what's noble and right—in keeping with the fact that our parents gave us life and have done us so many kindnesses—we, as children, shouldn't abuse our authority or take too many liberties with them, even unintentionally, because to do so doesn't fit in with the fact that we have lived under the shelter of their many kindnesses. To exercise power, abusing the fact that we are their children, abusing their love and compassion for us, ordering them around and speaking harshly with them—these are grave errors on our part.

Some children argue with their parents in an arrogant way simply because of their greed. They pester their parents to buy them things like their friends', with no thought at all for the family budget. They want this thing or that, so-and-so much money: a constant turmoil. As for the parents, their hearts are ready to burst. It's hard enough to raise a child as it is, but even harder when the child never seems to grow up. So I ask that you each consider this carefully. Raising a child is a much heavier burden than raising any number of animals. If there's anyone who hasn't experienced any great hardship in life, try raising a child or two, and you'll know what it's like.

Now, in saying this, my purpose isn't to criticize the children here. I'm just speaking in line with the way things are all over the world. I too have sat on my parents' heads, urinating and defecating all over them. I doubt that there's anyone who could match me in

this respect. My purpose in saying these things is simply to give all of us, who have used our parents as servants, a sense of the wrong we have done them, so that we won't be proud or arrogant with them, and won't try to force them to do things that are improper or before the right time has come. No matter how poor our parents may be, they have worked their hardest to provide for us to the best of their ability. All of us gathered here today have been children raised with the utmost hardship by their parents. Don't think that you're a deity who floated down from some heavenly mansion and made a spontaneous appearance without anyone to give you birth or care for you. It's only through the suffering and hardships of our parents that we now sit here as adults, students, teachers, or whatever. To put it plainly, *the fact that we've been able to grow is thanks to the hardships and difficulties our parents have borne so patiently.* None of our parents have been millionaires with wealth like an ocean—apart from the ocean of love and compassion in their hearts that will never run dry.

If we were to keep a record of how much our parents have spent on each of us, we'd be so shocked at the amount that we wouldn't be able to finish the account. The money has flowed out in every direction, regardless of the season. But no parents have ever dared keep such a record, because the expenditures have no value for them when compared to their love for their children, who are flesh and blood of their very hearts. Think about it. How many children does each parent have for whom he or she has to make so many sacrifices of so many sorts before the children can grow to the point where they really count as human beings and the parents can relax some of their concern. And then there are the children who never grow up, who keep pestering their parents to the day they die.

So all of us, as our parents' children, should have a sense of our own indebtedness. Don't regard yourself as smarter than your parents or superior to them. Their kindness has sheltered you from

the moment you first entered the womb up to the present. This is why parents are said to be the *Brahmās*—the gods—of their children. Their love for their children is love from pure motives. Their compassion, compassion from pure motives. They make all sorts of sacrifices—again, from pure motives. There are no hidden or ulterior motives involved at all. No matter how rich or capable the child becomes, the parents' compassion and concern never fades.

For this reason, children who are ungrateful to the parents who have been so kind to them are destroyed as people—even though they may think they're advanced. There's no way they can prosper as human beings with cool virtues in their hearts. Any wealth they may gain is like a fire burning their homes and their hearts at all times, because the evil that comes from destroying the source of one's life is bound to bear such heavy results that no one else can be of any help. This is an ancient and irrefutable law that has been taught us by sages. If you don't want to fall into hell in this very life, you should reflect on your parents' kindness and show them your gratitude. You'll then be sure to prosper like all other good human beings.

The Dhamma teaches us to be grateful to our benefactors, such as our parents and teachers. Anyone who has cared for us, anyone who has taught us, we should respect and help whenever the occasion calls for it. Don't be callous, stubborn, or proud of your higher status or education. Always bear your benefactors' kindnesses in mind. Remember that you are their child, their student. Always think of yourself as beneath them, in the same way that a mountain, no matter how tall, is always beneath the feet of the person who climbs it. No matter how sharp a knife may be, it can't get that way without a whetstone; no matter how knowledgeable we may be, we couldn't get that way without our teachers. For this reason, the

Buddha teaches us to respect our parents and teachers as the first step in becoming a decent human being.

Human Values, Human Worth

Dhamma is something very profound. If the world didn't have Dhamma as water to put out its fires, it would be a very difficult place—an impossible place—to live. Dhamma is something for the heart to hold to, something that nourishes and enables people to be good and to find peace. The religion, the aspect of Dhamma we can describe to one another, is simply the good and right teaching of the Buddha, which can guide the society and nation as well as individuals, our families and ourselves. Thus, it's like a factory unequalled in producing good and noble qualities in the hearts of people at large.

Any home, any family, any individual without religion, without moral virtue to protect and train the heart, is sure to be constantly troubled and restless with never any sense of well-being and equilibrium at all. Quarrels tend to flare up in families like this, between husband and wife, and then on out into society—the neighborhood and the workplace. Our inability to get along with one another

comes, for the most part, from our going against the principles of morality—what is correct, noble, and good.

In particular, when a husband and wife have trouble getting along with each other, it's because one or the other of them has gone beyond the bounds of two principles taught by the Buddha: contentment with one's belongings while not infringing on those of others, and fewness of wants. In other words, if you have one partner, don't try to have two, because once you have two, they're bound to become arch-rivals.

What sort of 'fewness of wants' do we mean here? I remember several years back, on the front pages of the newspapers—and it was really disturbing to see—one of the top officials of the government made an announcement telling monks that the two principles of contentment and fewness of wants shouldn't be taught to people at large because both of these principles were acting as a deadweight on the nation's economy, which the government was trying to develop at the time. According to him, these two principles were at odds with economic prosperity. This was many years back, but I haven't forgotten it—because it was something hard to forget, and disturbing as well. Actually, these two principles don't at all mean what he thought they did. They're principles that people in general, lay as well as ordained, should put into practice in line with their position in life. There's no word, no phrase of the Dhamma at odds with the progress of the world. In fact, the Dhamma gives the world nothing but support and protection.

For a monk—a son of the Buddha—these two principles mean that he shouldn't be greedy for the four necessities of life: 1.) Clothing, which comes from the generosity of people at large; 2.) Food. No matter what kind of food it is, a monk can't acquire it on his own. He has to depend on others to look after his needs in this

area, from the day of his ordination to his last day as a monk; 3.) Shelter; and 4.) Medicine.

All of these things come from the good faith of people in general, which is why a monk shouldn't be greedy for them, because that would go against the basic principles of the Dhamma taught by the Buddha. A monk should be modest in his needs. This is the proper way for him to act—in keeping with the fact that he has to depend on other people to look after his needs—so that he won't be too great a burden on people of good faith. A monk shouldn't clutter himself up with concerns for physical necessities, which are simply means to keep the body going so that he can perform his duties as a contemplative with ease.

As for lay people, the principle of fewness of wants means being content with one's family. One husband should have one wife. One wife should have one husband. One husband should have only one wife—not two or three, which would be a fire spreading to consume himself and his family. This is what it means to have fewness of wants—not being greedy for thrills that would stoke fire in the family, and not dabbling in the many desires that, added together, wage war with one another.

A husband and wife should be honest with each other. Loyal and committed. Faithful to each other at all times and in all places, with no secrets from each other—open and aboveboard with each other with pure and loyal hearts. If one of them has to work outside the home or be away for the night, he or she should go with a clean heart and clean hands, and come back without the blemish of any stains. If one of them has to go away on business, no matter how near or far, it should be done in such a way that the one at home needn't worry or be troubled that the one going away is doing anything wrong by demolishing the principle of fewness of wants and sleeping with someone outside the legitimate account. Worries like

this are worse than a hundred spirits returning from the dead to grab a person's entrails and squeeze them to bits. If a husband or wife must go away for a long time, it should be for reasons that aim at maintaining the family in happiness and joy.

When a husband and wife are faithful to each other in this way, then no matter where either of them goes, neither of them suffers from any worries or distrust. They live together smoothly and happily to the end of their lives because the important principle is that their hearts are honest and loyal to each other. Even if there may be times when they have barely enough to scrape by, that isn't important. The important point lies in their being honest, faithful, and committed to each other. A family of this sort may be rich or poor, but the happiness, security, and trust its members feel for one another give them the stability and solidarity that everyone hopes for. This is called fewness of wants in the marriage relationship: *One husband. One wife. No outside involvements.* Even though other men and women fill the world, we don't get involved. This is fewness of wants for lay people.

If this principle of fewness of wants were to be erased from the world, human beings would know no bounds, and we wouldn't be any different from dogs in heat. Have you ever seen them? Here in the Northeast they get going in August and September, but in the Central Plains it's usually November, barking and howling like crazy. There's no telling which one is which one's husband and which one is which one's wife. They bite one another to shreds. Have you ever seen them, every August and September? When they really get going they run everywhere, all over the place, with no sense of day and night, home or away, no concern for whether or not they get fed. They go after each other worse than when they're rabid.

If we human beings were to let ourselves run loose like that, we'd cause even worse damage than they do because we have guns and

weapons to shoot and kill one another, thanks to the fact that we're smarter than they are. The world would be a shambles, and there wouldn't be enough room for us all in the prisons. This is the harm that comes from letting oneself go under the unruly power of sexual lust. There'd be no such word as 'enough,' and no doubt but that dogs in heat would be no match for us.

Dogs have no sense of limits when lust takes over. They can go anywhere at all with no fear of death, no concern for hunger or thirst at all. They run wild, without a thought for their owners. At most, they may stop by their homes for a moment. If anyone feeds them in time, they eat. If not, they're off and running. And look at them. What do they look like at times like this? Ears torn, mouths torn, legs torn, stomachs ripped open in some cases, all from the fights they get into. Some of them die, some of them go crazy, some of them never return home.

When animals get going like this under the power of lust, this is the sort of harm it leads to. And even with them, it's nothing pretty to look at because it's so different from their normal nature. When the season comes, males and females go running wild after one another. The fires of lust and anger get burning together and can consume everything. This is what happens when animals know no bounds—that is, when their lust knows no limits. They suffer so much pain, so much distress when the disease of lust flares up—so much so that some of them die or are crippled for life.

If we human beings didn't have the Dhamma of fewness of wants as brakes on our wheels for our own safety's sake, we'd know no limits in following our instincts either. Because of our intelligence, we'd cause much more harm and destruction to one another than animals do. If we're intelligent in the right way, it's an honor and a benefit to ourselves, our family and nation, but this human intelligence of ours is something that lends itself to all sorts of uses, and for the

most part, if our minds are low, it becomes a tool for doing a great deal of evil. It's because of our intelligence that we human beings can do one another so much harm.

This is why we need moral virtue as a guide, as protection, so that we can live together happily and in peace. Between husbands and wives this means being faithful to each other. Don't go looking for scraps and leftovers like our friends in August and September. That's not the sort of policy that human beings—who know enough to have a sense of right and wrong, good and bad—should put into practice. Otherwise we'll destroy, or at the very least reduce, the honor of our human status. Worse than that, we'll ruin ourselves to the point of having absolutely no worth.

To give in to the moods of our inner fires, looking for scraps and leftovers in bars, night clubs, massage parlors, and other places catering to this sort of thing, is to destroy our inner virtue as human beings step by step, because it's nothing more than the policy of animals who know no bounds of good and evil, and know only how to get carried away with their passion and bite one another to shreds. For this reason, it's a policy we human beings shouldn't put into practice—and especially when we're married, because it goes against the secure bounds of the family we've established in line with the recognized universal principles of moral human beings.

To go out of bounds in this way would do such damage to a spouse's heart that no treatment could cure the sorrow and bring the heart back to normal. So husbands and wives who cherish each other's worth shouldn't do this sort of thing. The way love can turn to hatred, and spouses can become enemies, is all due to our disobeying the principle of fewness of wants. To lack this principle is to lack an important guarantee for the family's well-being.

This principle of fewness of wants isn't really a minor principle. It's one by which a husband and wife can keep a firm and stable

hold on each other's hearts throughout time, one by which they can be loyal to each other in a way that will never fade. The money the family earns will all flow together into one place, and not go leaking out to feed the vultures and crows. No matter how much is spent, every penny, every cent goes toward the family's well-being, instead of leaking out through the destructive force of sensual greed. This way the wealth gained by the family is something peaceful. Its expenditure is reasonable and beneficial to the husband, wife, and children, so that it's a thing of value and a cause of joy to its owners.

This is why the Buddha teaches us to train our hearts in the way of the Dhamma. The heart is very important. A stable heart means stable wealth. If the heart is unstable, our wealth is unstable as well. It will leak away day and night, because the heart creates the leak and can't keep hold of anything at all. When a water jar is still good, it can serve its full purpose. The minute it begins to crack, its usefulness is reduced; when it breaks, there's no further use for it. The same holds true with a marriage. One's spouse is very important. There is no greater foundation for the wealth, security, and happiness of the family than when both sides are honest, loyal, and faithful to each other. So I ask that you put these principles into practice in yourselves, your families, and your work so that they lead you to lasting happiness and peace. Don't let yourselves stray from the principles of moral virtue that protect and maintain your own inner worth, together with your families' peace and contentment.

The defilement *(kilesa)* of sexual craving, if left to itself, knows virtually no limits or sense of reason. As the Buddha has said: "There is no river equal to craving." Rivers, seas, and oceans, no matter how vast and deep, still have their banks, their shores, their islands and sandbars, but sensual craving has no limits, no islands or banks, no means for keeping itself within the bounds of moderation and propriety at all. It flows day and night, flooding its banks in the heart

at all times. If we didn't have the teachings of moral virtue as a levee to keep it in check, the world would be in a total chaos due to the pull of craving and jealousy. If we were to let sexual desire run wild, we'd be much more fierce than our friends in August and September, wiping one another out under the influence of sexual desire. On top of that, we'd make such a display of our stupidity that we'd be the laughingstock of the animal kingdom. So for the sake of maintaining our honor as human beings and so that we won't be fools in the eyes of our fellow animals, we must hold to moral virtue as our guide in knowing the proper bounds for our conduct as it affects both ourselves and our families.

Moral virtue means what's noble and good. It's a quality that gives security and stability to the world, a quality that the world has wanted all along. It's one of the highest forms of nourishment for the heart. It's the aspect of reason that guarantees the correctness of our behavior; a quality in which the beings of the world place their trust and that no one criticizes—for it lies beyond criticism. That's moral virtue, in other words, the principles of reason. Suppose we earn five dollars. However many dollars we spend, we spend them reasonably, not wastefully. If we earn one dollar, a hundred, a thousand, a million, we use reason in deciding how to spend and save our earnings so that we can benefit from them in line with their worth, in line with the fact that they have value in meeting our needs and providing for our happiness.

But if the heart leaks, if it lacks principles, our earnings will vanish like water from a leaky pot. No matter how much we earn, it'll all be wasted. Here I'm not talking about spending our wealth in ways that are useful and good. That's not called being wasteful. I'm talking about spending it in ways that serve no real purpose, in ways that can actually harm its owner. Wealth spent in these ways becomes poison, a means for ruining its foolish owner in a way that's

really a shame. People like this can't get any real use out of their wealth simply because they lack the moral virtue that would ensure their security and that of their belongings. As a result, they bring disaster on themselves, their possessions, and everything else that gives them happiness.

This is why moral virtue is very crucial to have. A family with moral virtue as its guide and protection is secure. Its members can talk to one another. They aren't stubborn and willful, and instead are willing to listen to one another's reasons for the smooth and proper course of their work and the other aspects of their life together. Even just the five precepts, if they hold to them, are enough to bring peace in the family. The five precepts are like an overcoat to protect us from the cold, an umbrella to protect us from the rain, a safe to protect our valuables—the hearts of the family members, and especially the husband and wife—to keep them from being damaged or destroyed by the unbounded force of desire.

The first precept, against killing living beings: The lives of all living beings—ours or anyone else's—are of equal worth. Each animal's life is of equal worth with the life of a human being, for if life is taken away from an animal, it can no longer be an animal. If life is taken away from a person, he or she can no longer be a person. In other words, the continuity of the animal's being or of the person's being is broken right then in just the same way. This is why we're taught not to destroy one another's lives, because to do so is to destroy absolutely the value of one another's being. Death is a fear striking deeper than any other fear into the heart of each animal and every person. This is why the Buddha teaches us to keep our hands off the lives of our fellow living beings.

The second precept, against stealing: To steal, to take things that haven't been given by their owner, is to mistreat not only the owners'

belongings, but also his or her heart. This is a very great evil, and so it's something we shouldn't do.

When we talk of other people's belongings, even a single needle counts as a belonging. These are things of value—both the belonging and the owner's heart. Every person cherishes his or her belongings. If the belonging is stolen, the owner is bound to feel hurt. The heart is the important factor here, more important than the actual belonging. To lose something through theft feels very different from having willingly given it away. The feelings of regret, added to the desire for revenge, can lead people to kill one another, even over a single needle. This issue of ownership is something very large and important for each person, which is why we're taught not to steal, because it has a devastating effect on the owner's heart—and that's a serious matter.

The act of stealing and the act of voluntary giving are two very different things. If it's a question of voluntary giving, any amount is easy to part with. Not to mention a needle, we can be happy even when giving things away by the hundreds, thousands, or millions. The person giving is happy and cheerful, the person receiving is pleased no end, and both sides are blessed, as has always been the case when the people of the world aid and assist one another.

The Dhamma treats all hearts as equals. It holds that each being's heart is of value to that being, which is why it teaches us not to mistreat the hearts of others by taking their lives, stealing their belongings, having illicit sex with their spouses or children—because all of these things have their owner: *the heart of a living being, which is a very serious matter.* No good is accomplished by stealing the goods and provoking the hearts of others in this way, because once the heart is provoked, it can be more violent than anything else. The murders that get committed everywhere have a sense of indignation, of having been wronged, as their motivating force. This is why the

Buddha teaches us to follow moral virtue as a way of showing respect for one another's hearts and belongings.

What this means is that we shouldn't abuse one another's hearts by doing anything immoral. For example, to kill a person is to devastate that person's heart and body, and has a devastating effect on others. In other words, people close to that person who are still alive will want to seek revenge. This person dies, but those people still live, and we end up seeking revenge against each other back and forth in an endless cycle for eons and eons.

The third precept, against illicit sex: All parents love their children; all husbands love their wives; all wives love their husbands. In any family, there is no greater love than that between the husband and wife. The husband and wife stake their lives on each other as if they were parts of the same body. There is no greater love in the family than his for her or hers for him. Their love is great and so is their sense of attachment and possessiveness. There is nothing that either of them cherishes nearly as much. If either of them is unfaithful or untrue to the other, looking for scraps and leftovers outside like a hungry mongrel, the other will feel more sorrow and disappointment than words can describe. The only comparison is that it's like having one's chest slashed open and one's heart ripped out and scattered all over the place—even though one hasn't yet died. How much will the wronged spouse suffer? This is something we can all answer without fear of error.

If any of you are thinking of mistreating your spouse in this way, I ask that you first take a good long look at the teachings of the religion—the foremost Dhamma of the foremost Teacher—to see what kind of teachings they are, what kind of teacher he was, and why great sages honor and revere him so highly. As for the defilements, and sexual desire in particular, *are there any sages who honor and*

revere them as anything special? So why is it that we honor and revere and like them so much?

If you start weighing things like this, you'll be able to resist and avoid these defilements to at least *some* extent. At the very least you'll be one of the more civilized members of the circle of those who still have defilements in their hearts. Your spouse will be able to sleep peacefully, secure and proud, instead of swallowing tears of misery—which is the direction the world is heedlessly rushing everywhere you look. You're lay people. You have sharper eyes than the old monk sitting before you here saying this with his eyes and ears closed, so surely you've seen what I'm talking about.

For the sake of mutual honor and smooth relations between husband and wife, there are some duties in the family where he should be in charge, and with which she shouldn't interfere unless he asks for her help. There are other duties where she should be in charge, and with which he shouldn't interfere unless she asks for his help. Each should let the other be in charge of whatever the other is best at. Each should honor and show deference to the other and not curse the other or cast aspersions on his or her parents or family. Always show respect when you speak of your spouse's family. Never speak of them with contempt. Even though there may be times when your opinions conflict, keep the issue between just the two of you. Don't go dragging in each other's family background, for that would be to show contempt for your spouse's heart in a way that can't be forgotten, and can lead to a split in the family—something neither of you wants.

If any differences of opinion come between you, don't be quick to feel anger or hatred. Think of the past, before you were married, and of how much you suffered from fear that your engagement would fall through. On top of that, think of all the trouble your families were put to as well. Now that you *are* married, in line with your

hopes, you should care for your union to see that it lasts as long as you both are alive.

In becoming husband and wife, you willingly gave your lives to each other. If any issue arises between the two of you, think of it as teeth biting the tongue—they lie close together, so it's only normal that they should get in each others' way now and then. Both of you share responsibility for each other, so you should regard your stability together as more important than the small matters coming between you that can hurt your relationship.

Always remember that both of you have left your parents and now each of you holds to the other as parent, friend, and life-mate. Whatever you do, think of the heart of your spouse and don't do anything that would hurt your spouse's feelings. Always think of the safety and well-being of your spouse. Don't be heedless or lax in your behavior, and your family will then be stable and secure.

All of this is part of the principle of fewness of wants. If you take this principle to heart, you can go wherever you like with a clear heart—whether your work keeps you at home or takes you away—for each of you can trust the other. The earnings you gain can provide for the family's happiness because you go in all honesty and work in all honesty for the sake of the family's well-being, contentment, and peace.

Even if the family is lacking in some things—in line with the principle of inconstancy—it's not nearly as serious as when a husband or wife starts looking outside. That's something very destructive. If a family has this sort of thing lurking inside it, then even if it has millions in the bank, it won't be able to find any happiness. But a family that lives by the principle of fewness of wants is sure to be happy and at peace—keeping your husband in mind, keeping your wife in mind, keeping in mind what belongs to you and what belongs

to others, without overstepping your bounds. Even if some things may be lacking at times, the family can live in contentment.

The important factor in our lives as human beings is the family and the relationship between husband and wife. If this is sound, then when children are born they won't bear the emotional scars of having their parents fight over the issues that arise when one of them goes out of bounds. When parents argue over other things—a lack of this or that or whatever—it's not too serious and can be taken as normal. But quarrelling over this sort of issue is very serious and embarrasses everyone in the family. So for this reason you should always be very strict with yourself in this matter. Don't let yourself be heedless or lax in your behavior.

As for quarrelling about other matters, you should be careful about that, too. When parents quarrel for any reason, the children can't look one another in the face. When they go to school or out with their friends, they can't look their friends in the face, because of their embarrassment.

The fourth precept, against lying: Why did the Buddha teach us not to lie? Let's think about it. Is there anything good about lying? Suppose everyone in the country, everyone in the world, lied to one another whenever they met. Wherever you'd go, there'd be nothing but lies. You wouldn't be able to get any truth or honesty out of anyone at all. If this were the case, how could we human beings live with one another? It'd be impossible. If we couldn't get any truth or honesty from one another, we wouldn't be able to live together. So, in order that friends, husbands, wives, parents, children, and people throughout society can live together and trust one another, we need to hold to honesty and truthfulness as a basic principle in all our dealings. The nation will then have a strong foundation.

Here I'm giving just a short explanation of the fourth precept so that you will see how great the value of truthfulness is. The fact that

the people of the world can live together is because of truthfulness, and not because of lies and dishonesty. Lies are very destructive to the world. People who hope for one another's well-being should be entirely honest and truthful in their dealings. Lies are like disembodied spirits that deceive people and eat away at the nation. This is why the society of good people despises those who tell lies and does its best to keep them out of its midst. The only people who like lying are those who harvest their crops from the hearts and livers of others—in other words, those who make their living by fraud and deceit. Lying is thus a means of livelihood only for evil people and is of absolutely no use to good people. This is why the Buddha taught us not to lie, because lies are like executioners waiting to torture people and bring them to a bad end.

The fifth precept, against drinking alcohol: What is alcohol? Alcohol here refers to any intoxicant. It changes the person who takes it from a full human being to one with something lacking. The more we take it, the more we're lacking, to the point where we become raving lunatics.

When we were newly born, our parents never gave us alcohol to drink. They gave us only good things like food to eat and mother's milk—good, pure things extracted from her blood—to drink. We were able to grow because of our mother's milk and the other good, nutritious food our parents gave us until we grew to adulthood. But after having grown up on good nutritious food, we then take alcohol and other intoxicants to poison and drug ourselves. Exactly where this adds to the value and honor of our status as human beings is something I have yet to see.

Think about this for a minute: Suppose that all of us sitting here were drunk, from old Grandfather Boowa on down. Suppose we were all roaring drunk, sprawled all over the roadsides. Everywhere you went, there'd be people defecating and urinating in their pants

all over the place, with no sense of shame or embarrassment in line with ordinary human manners. Could you stand to look at it? If alcohol were really good, as people like to pretend it is, wouldn't good people then express their admiration for drunkards sprawled all over the roadsides, their urine and excrement covering themselves and their surroundings? "These drunkards are really outstanding, aren't they? They don't have to look for a place to defecate. They can do it right in their pants. Ordinary people can't do that. These drunkards are really extraordinary, aren't they?" Would they ever say anything like this?

Suppose that wherever you went there were drunken people all over the roadside. Could you bear to look at it? With drunken people—in other words, crazy people—everywhere, who could stand it? Where would you get any good people willing to come and look at the crazy people all over the nation? There'd be no more value left to human beings. There'd be nothing but crazy people filling the country. Is this the way alcohol is good? It's good only for making people crazy. There's nothing good about the alcohol itself, so where are the crazy people who drink it going to get anything good from it? Who would want to live in this world if there were nothing but people crazy from drinking, sprawled all over the place, staking out their claims on every roadside.

This is why the Buddha cautioned us against drinking alcohol. *He didn't want people all over the nation to be crazy, ruining their good manners as human beings and ruining their work.* A drunken person is no different from a dead person. He can't do any work—aside from boasting. He damages his intelligence and finds it easy to do anything at all with no sense of conscience or deference, no fear of evil or the results of *kamma*, no respect for people or places at all. He can go anywhere and say anything with no sense of shame or embarrassment. He can speak without stopping from dawn to dusk—that's a

drunken person. He talks endlessly, going around in circles, boring his listeners to death. After a while, "Well, it's time to get going." Then he starts talking again. Then, "Well, I guess I'd better be going." Then he starts talking again. He goes on and on like this all day long—"I guess I'd better be going," all day long, but he never goes—that's a drunken person. He speaks without any purpose, any aim, any substance, any concern for whether what he says is good or bad, right or wrong. He can keep babbling endlessly, without any sense of the time of day. *That's drunkenness—no mindfulness, no restraint at all.* A person at his stupidest is a drunken person, but he's the one who boasts most of his cleverness. A drunken person is nothing but a crazy person, which is why alcohol is called 'crazy water.' Whoever wants to be a decent human being should refrain from it. There's nothing good about alcohol, so as good people how can we pretend that bad things—things that make us dizzy and drunk—can make us good in any way?

This has been just a short explanation of the five precepts, from the one against killing to the one against taking intoxicants. These precepts are called the principles of morality—principles for human beings, beings who are endowed with a high status, the status that comes with intelligence. To be an intelligent human being means to be clever in maintaining your moral virtue, not clever in taking intoxicants, creating animosity, or abusing other people. People of that sort aren't called intelligent. They're called fools.

The teachings of the Buddha are accurate, correct, and appropriate for human beings to put into practice in line with their position in life. There's nothing in the principles of the Dhamma to act as deadweight on the progress of the world. In fact, the world is what acts as a deadweight on the Dhamma, destroying it without any real sense of shame. If we act like this, all we lack is tails. Otherwise, they could call us dogs. Even without tails they can still call us dogs when

we act so dissolutely that we outstrip the world. If we go out and try to snatch tails from dogs, we should watch out—they might bite us.

We've gotten way out of bounds. We say we've progressed, that we're advanced and civilized, but if we get so reckless and carried away with the world that we don't give a thought to what's reasonable, noble, or right, then the material progress of the world will simply become a fire with which we burn one another, and we won't have a world left to live in.

This is what it means to be a fake human being. This is what we fake human beings are like. If we try to pretend that we're genuine human beings, we don't have any moral virtue to our name. We don't have any manners good enough to fit in with our status as human beings. If we try to pretend that we're animals, we don't have any tails. These are the sorts of difficulties we get ourselves into, the damage we do to ourselves and the common good if we go against the teachings of the religion. And this is why the practice of the Dhamma is fitting for our true status as human beings—because the Buddha taught the religion to the human race.

"Nisamma karaṇaṃ seyyo"

"Before you do anything, reflect on whether it's right or wrong." Don't act simply on your moods or desires. Moods and desires have no true standards. Desire: You can desire everything. Even when you've eaten your fill, you can still want more. Your desires are hungry—hungry all the time. That's desire. It has no standards or limits at all. The Buddha calls this the lower side of the mind.

This is why you need to use Dhamma to contemplate 'desire' and take it apart to see what it wants. If, on reflection, you see that what it wants is reasonable, only then should you go ahead and act on it. But if it wants to eat and, after you've eaten, it still wants more, then ask it: "*What more do you want to eat? The sky? Nobody in the world eats sky. Whatever people eat, you've already eaten. You've had*

enough already, so what more do you want?" When your desires are stubborn, you really have to come down hard on them like this if you want to be a good person of moderate wants.

We have to teach ourselves, to force ourselves to stay within limits and restrictions, for our desires and moods, if left to themselves, know no limits. If we act simply in line with our desires, the human race will degenerate, so we need the principles of moral virtue as our guide. The teachings of the religion are an important means for putting ourselves in order as good people living in happiness and peace. If you lack moral virtue, then even if you search for happiness until the day you die, you'll never find it. Instead, you'll find nothing but suffering and stress.

What's right and appropriate, no matter who you are, is to put the teachings of the religion into practice. To lack Dhamma—in other words, to lack goodness and virtue—is to lack the tools you need to find happiness.

The world is becoming more and more troubled day by day because we lack moral virtue in our hearts and actions. All we see is the world acting as deadweight on moral virtue, trampling it to bits. Don't go thinking that moral virtue is deadweight on the world. Moral virtue has never harmed the world in any way. Actually, the world tramples all over moral virtue and destroys it, leaving us empty-handed, without any guide. We then end up destroying one another in a way that's really appalling. So I ask that you see both the harm that comes from a lack of moral virtue and the value of putting moral virtue into practice. You yourself will prosper, your family will prosper, and the nation will prosper because you have the Dhamma as your shield and protection.

Our value and worth as human beings comes from our morality, our virtue, and our behavior, you know. It doesn't come from our skin and flesh the way it does with animals. When animals such as

fish and crabs die, you can take their flesh to market and come back with money in your pockets; but try taking the flesh of a dead person to market and see what happens. Everyone in the market will scatter in an uproar from fear of the dead. Since when has our human worth lain with our skin and flesh? It lies with our behavior, our manners and hearts that have moral virtue as their guide and adornment. People with moral virtue are people of value. Wherever they live, everything is at peace and at ease.

If we human beings have moral virtue as our adornment, we're attractive in a way that never loses its appeal, no matter how old we get. We have value because of our virtue. If moral virtue is lacking in the family, the family will tend to become more and more troubled. If virtue is very much lacking, the family will be very much troubled; and if it's completely lacking, the whole family will be destroyed.

This should be enough explanation for the moment. I ask that you contemplate what I've said and put it into practice so as to rid yourselves of the dangers that have been threatening you and your families, so that you can instead meet with nothing but happiness and peace. Be intent on treating one another well—and especially between husbands and wives, *I ask that you treat your spouse as having equal worth with yourself.* Don't try to debase you spouse's value and exalt your own through the power of your moods. To do so is simply to trample all over each other, and isn't at all the proper or right thing to do. Treat yourselves as having equal value, both in moral terms and in terms of the family. Your family will then prosper and be happy.

Water *for* the Fires *of* the World

The Lord Buddha was a frugal man—one who continually made sacrifices. Frugality, thrift, and moderation are all qualities that go together, but they don't mean stinginess. Stinginess is one thing; frugality, thrift, and moderation are something else. Frugality means having principles. Stinginess means being miserly and unable to get along with anyone. People don't like to associate with stingy people because they're afraid their livers will fall prey to the long reach of the stingy person who's greedy and selfish, who excels at taking advantage of others.

Stinginess, selfishness, and greed are all part of a set. When people have a great deal of stinginess, their greed is great. Their selfishness is great and deep-rooted as well. They're happy when they can take advantage of others. These qualities make it hard—make it impossible—for them to get along with anyone at all. Whenever they associate with anyone, they're simply waiting for a chance to eat out that person's liver and lungs. Those who associate with them will

have to lose their livers, their lungs, their large and small intestines, and so on until they have nothing left because stinginess, selfishness, and greed keep eating away the whole time.

Even when selfish people make sacrifices, it's like bait on the barb of a hook waiting to snag fish in the mouth. They give a little in order to get a lot in return. People of this sort are a danger that we human beings are subject to—a danger in no way inferior to any of the others we have to face. Honest people, principled people, and stupid people are all falling prey to this sort of thing.

When stingy people make sacrifices, each little bit is like pulling taffy. Have you ever seen taffy? They sell it in the markets—or at least they used to. Whether they still sell it or not, I don't know. It's very sticky. When you pull off a piece, you have to pull and pull and pull until—NUPP!—and all you get is a little tiny piece. NUPP!—just a little piece and that's all. "I'm making a donation…" they announce it to the nation. If they could, they'd have it announced on radio and television. "I'm a good-hearted soul making a donation of so-and-so much." It's nothing but taffy. If even the slightest piece comes off, it has to go NUPP!

How can people of this sort say they believe in merit and the law of *kamma?* Actually, all they believe in are the defilements lording over their heads. They make the announcement to please their defilements, in hopes that other people will respect them. Even though there's no real goodness to them, they're satisfied if other people say they're good. This is why, when we're stingy, we're a danger to the world, to our fellow human beings and other living beings in general. And this is why the Dhamma teaches us to beware of being stingy—because it makes us destroy ourselves, first of all, and then others, without limit.

To be generous, to make sacrifices makes us good friends with other people and living beings in general. Wherever we go, we're

at peace. The ability to make sacrifices comes from good will and benevolence, from being generous and gentle toward all our fellow human beings and other living beings in the world.

Our Lord Buddha was called "*mahā kāruṇiko nātho hitāya sabba pāṇīnaṁ.*" Listen to that! "A refuge of great compassion for the benefit of all beings." This came from his moderation and frugality. This was the path he followed. This is why people who follow his path never come to a bad end. Instead, they prosper and attain peace.

In particular, they prosper in their hearts, which is more important than any other sort of prosperity there is. If there's prosperity in our hearts, then the world can live in happiness and peace. But if there's only material prosperity, with no prosperity in the heart, it can't give the world any happiness. In fact, if there's no Dhamma at all seeping into the heart, external prosperity can do nothing but make the world more hot and troubled than before. If there's prosperity both in the world and in the heart, then material prosperity is an adornment for our beauty and well-being.

The Buddha and his disciples—who left home to practice so that they could share the Dhamma with us—sacrificed everything of every sort. They laid their lives on the line and struggled through all sorts of hardships. And not all the disciples were ordinary people like us. Quite a few of them came from the families of kings, financiers, and landowners, from very refined backgrounds. But when they went forth into the homeless life, they made themselves into rags and foot mats. Their path of practice was frugal and sparing, beset with poverty. They didn't concern themselves much with external plenty or wealth. Instead, they were concerned with the wealth and fullness of the Dhamma in their hearts. They didn't leave room in their hearts for any of the values that pride places on things. They abandoned all values of that sort so as to become rags without any vanity or conceit. But as for their inner quality, these rags wrapped

gold in their hearts. Their hearts contained riches: the treasures of concentration, discernment, all the way to the greatest treasure—release in the heart.

Just now I mentioned moderation. Moderation means not forgetting yourself, not getting reckless with luxury and pride. It means having standards in the heart, without being concerned over how many or how few possessions you have. If you have things to use, you keep using them as long as they're still serviceable. If they wear out, you keep fixing and repairing them until you can't fix them any further. Only then do you let them go. Even when you let them go, you find other uses for them until there's no use left to them at all. That's when you throw them away. This is how things were done in the Buddha's time. Ven. Ānanda, for instance, when his robes were worn out, would chop them into shreds and mix them into the clay he used to plaster his dwelling. Whether it was because India is very hot or what, I don't know, but at any rate they used clay to plaster their dwellings. They didn't throw things away. If anything still had a use, they'd keep trying to fix it and put it to use in that way.

In our present day there was Ven. Ācariya Mun. His robes, bathing cloths, even his handkerchiefs—I don't know how many times he patched and darned them. They were so spotted with patches and stitches that they looked like leopard skin. And he wouldn't let anyone replace his robes with new ones, you know. "They're still good. Can't you see?" Imagine how it felt when he said that! That's how he took care of his things—and how he taught us to take care of ours as well. He wasn't excited by new things at all.

Whenever monks came to search him out, he'd prod them on in the area of concentration and discernment. He'd teach them the Dhamma for the sake of peace, calm, and inner prosperity. As for external goods, I never heard him discuss them. He wasn't interested. And he himself was prosperous within. In whatever he looked for,

he prospered. If he looked for Dhamma, he prospered in Dhamma. Whatever he looked for he found—because all these things exist in the world. If we look for suffering, we'll find suffering. If we look for happiness, we'll find happiness. Whatever we really look for, we find. *After all, these things all exist in the world, don't they? So why shouldn't we be able to find them?*

This is why we should look for virtuous qualities to give peace to our hearts. The world is hot and troubled because the hearts of the world are hot and troubled. And the reason they're hot and troubled is because they have no Dhamma to put out their fires. There's nothing but fire, nothing but fuel, stuffed over and over into the heart of every person, and then it spreads out to consume everything. No matter how broad or narrow the world may be, it's hot and troubled —not because of physical fire, not because of the heat of the sun, *but because of the fires of passion and craving, the fires of anger and delusion. That's why the world is aflame.*

If we have water to put out these fires, in other words, if we have Dhamma to act as our standard for evaluating the way we treat one another and living beings in general, if we have Dhamma as our protection, *then the world can cool down.* We can live together with good will, compassion, and forgiveness, seeing that our hearts and the hearts of others have the same value—equal value—that we're all alike in loving pleasure and hating pain. This way we can be mutually forgiving because we respect one another's intentions and aren't vain or condescending, abusive or oppressive with one another.

The main problem is the type of person who tries to climb up on the heads of other human beings and hopes to relish happiness alone in the midst of the suffering of the rest of the world. People like this take the rest of humanity as their toilet. They climb up and defecate on other people's heads, reserving happiness and the status

of humanity for themselves alone, while they turn everyone else into a toilet. How on earth can anyone live with wicked people like this? They go too far beyond the bounds of morality and the rest of the world for anyone to forgive them. People of this sort can't live in peace anywhere or with anyone. And because they're the type with no moral sense, they're bound to be very destructive to the common good. Even the Lord of hell doesn't dare take them into his register for fear that when they go to hell they'll disrupt the place and blow it apart.

As for people who sympathize with one another and see that all human beings are of equal value, they find it easy to be forgiving and to live with one another in peace. They don't despise one another for belonging to this or that class or for having only this or that much wealth—all of which are simply a matter of each person's *kamma.* After all, no one wants to be poor or stupid. Everyone wants to be intelligent, wealthy, and highly respected. But when it isn't possible, we have to leave it to the truth that living beings differ in their *kamma. Whatever past kamma you have, you experience it and make use of it in line with what you've got.* If we can forgive one another, with the thought that each living being has his or her own *kamma,* we can live together in peace. If we believe in the Dhamma, we have to believe in *kamma* and not in the defilements that make us arrogant and proud.

Don't go mixing up the *kamma* of different people, thinking: "That person is beneath me… I'm above that person… That person is stupider than I am… I'm smarter than that person." If you compare *kamma* like this, it leads to pride, disdain, and hard feelings, and ends up in trouble. If we respect the fact that each of us has his or her own *kamma,* there's no trouble and no reason for hard feelings. Just as when we respect the fact that each person has his or her own spouse—even when we mix together in our work, what harm can it

do? Each of us realizes which is theirs and which is ours. In the same way, each person's good or bad *kamma* is his or her own affair. If we don't mix them up, the world can live in harmony.

So. This is how the principles of the religion teach us to understand things and to conduct our lives so as to make peace within ourselves. The result is that society, too, will be at peace if we all practice the Dhamma in line with our position in life.

We should try to train ourselves at least somewhat, you know. If we don't train ourselves, there's no good to us. Anything, no matter what, if it doesn't get trained and put into shape, there's no use for it at all. Like wood—whether it's hardwood or softwood, it has to be cut into beams, boards, and so forth before it can serve the purpose for which we intend it. So you should train yourself in whichever direction you want to be good. If you hope to be good just by sitting around, it won't work. You'll be good only in name: Mr. Good, Ms. Good. The good is only in the name. *The people behind the names aren't any good unless they train themselves to be good.*

Mange *in* the Mind

Once, when the Buddha was still alive, his opponents hired some people to curse him and Ven. Ānanda when they were out on their alms round. "You camels. You skinheads. You beggars,"—that's what they say in the texts. Ven. Ānanda got all upset and asked the Buddha to go to another city—a city where they wouldn't get cursed, a city where they wouldn't get criticized. The Buddha asked him, "And what should we do, Ānanda, if they curse us there?"

"Leave that city and go to another."

"And if they curse us there, where are you going to go? If you keep running away from wherever they curse you, in the end you won't have a world left to live in."

"This is why it's not right to run away from your enemies by escaping from one place and going to another. The only right way to escape is to be aware in your heart and escape into your heart. If you're sharp enough to contend with the enemies in your heart, your

outside enemies won't mean a thing. You can live where you like and go where you like with no trouble at all."

That's what the Buddha said, after which he added—he said it in *Pāli,* but I'll give you just the gist—"We're like elephants going into battle." (In those days they used elephants in battle, you know, they didn't wage war the way we do now.) "We're like elephants going into battle. We don't pay any heed to the arrows coming at us from all sides. We're intent only on going into the front lines and crushing the enemy to bits with our own strength and ability. We can't be shaken by the dangers coming from this place or that."

The same sort of thing holds true for us. We're students of the Buddha. If we run here because there are enemies over there, and then run there because of enemies over here, always on the run in this way from dawn to dusk to the day we die… If we're like this, then we're like a mangy dog. It itches here, so it scratches itself and then runs over there, hoping to get away from the itch. Once it gets there, it still itches, so it scratches some more and runs on. It'll never come to the end of this, because the itch lies in its own skin. But if it gets over its mange, it won't itch and won't scratch, and can be comfortable wherever it goes.

As for us, we've got the kind of mange that makes us itch and scratch in our own hearts, so we have to cure it right here in our hearts. When people criticize us, what do they say? Take their words to contemplate so that you can get to the facts. Usually, we just react to our first assumptions about their criticisms. What are those assumptions? Suppose they say that Old Grandfather Boowa is a skinhead. Am I really a skinhead? I have to take a good look at myself. If I really am a skinhead, I have to admit that they're right, that what they say is true. Once you take the approach of accepting what's right, what's true, then there are no more issues.

This is how you straighten out your life—by straightening out your heart. If they say good things about you, how does your mind zip out to react? If they say bad things, how does it react? As soon as they've said those things, the breath with which they said them is past and gone. They say good things, and that breath is gone. They say bad things, and that breath is gone—but the breath of the thoughts that get formed in our mind: that doesn't go. Our attachments and assumptions will hold it right here and then burn us right here with all the smoldering thoughts we keep stirring up.

So we end up saying that this person is no good, that person is no good—but as for the way we burn and get ourselves all upset, we don't give any thought to whether that's any good or not. This is the point we usually don't straighten out, which is why we go criticizing this and that and get things all worked up. But if you do straighten out this point, then you can live wherever you like. Your outside manner in dealing with people may be heavy or light, as the case may call for, but within yourself you're not stuck on either *yourself, the issues that get sent your way, or the other person, the breath with which that person says things—not stuck on anything at all.* Only then can you say that you're practicing the Dhamma. This is how you straighten things out when you straighten out your life.

If you try to go straightening things out outside—straightening out this person and that, running away from this one and that—where are you going to run to? If you run away from this person, you run into that one. Run away from that person, and you run into this one. If there's no one left to run away from, you end up running into yourself, because you're a person too. This is how you have to think when you practice the Dhamma. You have to encompass everything.

The Buddha didn't teach people to be stupid, you know—running from this city to that, in the way Ven. Ānanda asked him to go to some other city where they wouldn't get cursed. The Buddha re-

fused to go. "Wherever we go, people have the same sort of mouths, so they can curse you in just the same way." That's how you have to think if you really want to look after your life.

A Good Dose *of* Dhamma

This world of ours—no matter how hot and feverish it may get—still has the teachings of the religion as its medicine. At the very least, it has the religion as its medicine so that there's a way to relieve its suffering to some extent. Just like a disease—no matter how serious it may get, if there's medicine to treat it we can gain at least some relief, unlike a disease we let run its own course without using any kind of medicine to treat it.

If the hearts of the world—our hearts—take their orders from nothing but defilements and suffering, then no matter what our race, class, or nationality, we won't be able to find any happiness or peace in the world at all, because our hearts have no teachings of the religion to give them relief.

The phrase "teachings of the religion" means teachings that adhere to the principle of cause and effect. In its most basic sense, the word 'religion' means cause and effect put together. To believe in the religion means to believe in the correct principles of cause

and effect, and not to resist them. If we practice in line with these principles, there will be a way to reduce the suffering and stress of the world, both within and without.

People who don't have any religion lurking within them—no matter where they live, no matter how well-educated or how wealthy they may be—can't find any happiness in which to set down the burdens of their hearts for even a moment because they have no place to set them down. And where could they set them down? All they have are their defilements, which are masses of flame. All they have are their unlimited desires, wanting things to happen in line with their hopes. Each of their desires creates suffering and stress that then turns around to burn them. But for the most part they don't get to meet with the things they want, and instead keep meeting with things they don't want. This is where the power of defilements leads the beings of the world.

But if we let the power of cause and effect—the power of the Dhamma—take the lead, then even though we meet with some pain and difficulties in going against the defilements as we follow the way of reason, the results when they appear still give us enough happiness and pleasure to relax and unwind our suffering. This is why the religion is an extremely essential teaching for the hearts of the world. In particular, we as human beings—who are more intelligent than the other beings of the world—should have the teachings of the religion as a treasure to adorn and protect our thoughts, words, and deeds to make the various aspects of our behavior beautiful to the eye and cooling to the heart, both individually and on the level of society at large.

The religion is an offshoot of pure Dhamma. It branches off from the superlative Dhamma—the marvelous Dhamma discovered by the Buddha—and takes the form of prescriptions that say, "Do this… Don't do that," and so forth, so that we can follow them and

not be at odds with the Dhamma of the correct and admirable path. Once we trust the principle of cause and effect, then no matter how difficult the path may be, we give it our best even when it goes against the grain. Actually, when it goes against the grain, that means it goes against the defilements, which are the enemies of the Dhamma. In other words, we go against the grain so as to do those things that are in keeping with the Dhamma. The heart gives the orders, so happiness, peace, and calm are results we're bound to receive.

I'll give you an example: Suppose you think about something today that gets you all worked up and upset. Your entire heart becomes a mass of flame. This is especially true if it's something that has really annoyed you and made you indignant. The mind gets wrapped up in the things that annoy it and make it upset. Day and night, sitting, standing, walking, and lying down, you won't let them go. You take them, instead of your meditation object, as your preoccupation, so how can the result be happiness? It has to be fire, burning continuously—because the matter itself is fire, and your thoughts about it are fire, so how can you expect them to result in any 'water' at all? They'll have to result in more fire, there are no two ways about it. The more you persist in dwelling on them, the more you damage your own heart. The final result is that you can't eat or sleep and hardly have enough presence of mind to put a stop to yourself. There are not just a few cases where people go crazy this way, destroyed by the things they think about.

What causes this destruction? The affairs of defilements, not the affairs of Dhamma. For this reason, when you resist thinking about bad things like these, when you block your trains of thought with mindfulness and break them off with discernment—even though it's difficult and goes against the grain—the results you can expect are mental peace, or at least enough mindfulness to contemplate the proper path to follow. You can evaluate what's right and what's

wrong concerning the topic you've been thinking about and can see why you felt compelled to think about it in the first place. *"You know it's no good, so why think about it? Can't you straighten yourself out for your own good?"*

This is how reason—the principle of cause and effect—deals with the matter. All its deliberations are for the sake of seeing the harm of those preoccupations because suffering and stress are already blatantly obvious in your heart that's so hot and troubled, and they come from your thoughts about that topic. "If you persist in dwelling on it any further, what's going to happen to you? As it is, the suffering is already blatant. If you keep thinking in that way, won't it grow until it overflows your heart? How will you be able to hold up under its weight? If you keep thinking in that way, the suffering will just keep growing and growing, and where will you get the strength to withstand the suffering you keep churning out with your thoughts about the things that have you so upset? Are you still going to keep thinking about them? Are you still going to keep piling more and more suffering on yourself?"

Just being able to think in this way is enough to bring the mind to its senses. And as soon as the mind comes to its senses, it can begin to calm down and rein itself in. It can try to let go of that preoccupation by using reason to push itself away and bring its thought processes under control. The suffering that resulted from those thoughts will also be brought under control, because the causes—those hot, burning thoughts—have been curbed. The fact that you're able to curb them is because mindfulness has reined them in. This is enough to show that your ability to resist those thoughts with mindfulness and evaluate them with discernment, to whatever extent you can, gives these sorts of results: calm and peace in the heart. And at this point, the suffering is curbed and disappears.

Even though the heart may be difficult to restrain, difficult to control, we should try to think up strategies for unburdening it in this way. Admittedly this is difficult, but it's a difficulty of the right path, for it results in well-being and happiness. The affair is no longer troubling and upsetting; our suffering stops piling on. We have a chance to relax, to unburden ourselves of our burning embers—the suffering and stress in the heart. This is one principle we can use in evaluating all the bad things that come our way.

For example, suppose that people curse you or spread gossip about you. You don't know how many days, how many months ago that curse or that gossip passed through their lips and out of their memory, but you find out about it today and immediately get upset. Actually, you don't know how many months or years ago the breath with which they cursed you or gossiped about you passed through their lips, but now a new breath passes through somebody else's lips and into your ears: "They said this about you… Mr. X and Ms. Y said these awful things about you." This second breath is the one you grab onto to burn yourself for no good reason at all. This is because of your own wrong assumptions. If that second person hadn't told you, your heart would have been fine, perfectly fine, even though those other people actually said those things about you. At the time it happened, you didn't feel anything at all, because your heart hadn't stirred itself up to be aware of those things. Your mind was in its normal state, and so, no pain or distress affected it in any way.

If we're mindful when people say these sort of things, we immediately realize that there's nothing good about the matter, so why should we grab hold of it to burden and dirty up the mind? We've already had experience with dirty things, haven't we? Even when we walk along a road and come across something dirty, we give it a wide berth. We don't want to touch it, not even with the sole of our foot, because we know that there's nothing good about it. If we go

touching it, we're sure to get dirty too. So why is it that we like to let the mind roll around in things we know are dirty? Why do we like to mess with them and think about them? To let ourselves get all worked up over things like this to the point where the entire mind gets dirty, the entire mind is set on fire, isn't proper at all!

When we think in this way, we can put a stop to those thoughts and concerns. The moment we start thinking about them again, mindfulness is there—quick and alert—so that we can let them go, instead of holding onto them to burn the heart again and again.

All that I've discussed so far is a principle of Dhamma for protecting yourself, for looking after yourself. If you use this method as a staple medicine in all your activities, your mind can keep its equilibrium and will rarely ever harm itself with the things that make contact through your senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Even if the thoughts that arise exclusively in the mind disturb you with bad things from the past, or whatever else makes contact, you'll be able to shake them off immediately because mindfulness and discernment are right there with the heart. As soon as you put them to use, you get immediate results.

The only problem is when we completely forget about our protectors—mindfulness and discernment—and let bad things come in and trample our hearts so that we have to endure the resulting pain. If we could admit to the fact that the suffering comes from our own stupidity and heedlessness, there would be no need to complain about it. But the fact is that people all over the world complain. Why? Because they don't want to suffer. If they don't want to suffer, then why do they keep thinking in ways that lead to suffering? Why do they persist in thinking about harmful things? Because they aren't alert to what's happening inside themselves. When this is the case, what can they use to be alert to these things? They have to use mindfulness and discernment, so that they can be up on events and

not at a total loss, so that they can hold on to at least something for themselves in the beginning stages of the practice. Eventually, they'll be up on events in every case, able to attack and win in every maneuver.

When we deal with ourselves in line with the principles of the religion, this is how we have to do it. If all of us in the world used reason as our guide, in both our internal and external affairs, we all would evaluate, understand, and avoid anything that posed dangers to ourselves individually or to the common good. We wouldn't persist in destroying ourselves and others by flirting recklessly with those dangers. As for that which would be of benefit to ourselves and the common good, we'd try to think up ways to produce those benefits. The whole world would prosper and flourish, and we'd all be happy and at peace. When we take the principles of the religion as our guide, they lead us in the direction of peace through correct practice in line with the principle of cause and effect, which is a universal principle leading to the prosperity of the world.

This is why the religion is something essential for enabling us to live together. Here I'm talking about our life together in the present. Even in the present we can be happy and secure, free from trouble and turmoil in body and mind. If the religion spreads out through society so that each person feels this way, the world can be at peace.

When we turn to consider the future of the mind—when it holds to reason as its basic principle, when it has Dhamma within it, what trouble can come to it? From where? After all, the mind itself is what produces its own troubles. If it doesn't produce any and if it has the Dhamma as its protection, then no matter what world the mind goes to after death, there will be no suffering or trouble that can come to oppress it at all.

The principles of the Dhamma teach that a mind with inner quality and worth is bound not to be reborn in a place where it

will meet with suffering and pain, because it doesn't have any of the sort of *kamma* that can force it to go there. All it has is the goodness—the inner quality—that will support it and convey it to good destinations, one after another. That's what its future holds in store.

A person who practices the Dhamma, who has Dhamma in the heart, is far different from one without any Dhamma. Even though they both may live in the same world and have the same sort of appearance, the differences in their knowledge, thoughts, views, and actions grow greater and greater, so there's no way they can expect to receive similar results. The results must differ just like the causes. This has been true from time immemorial.

This is why the Buddha said: "*Kamma* is what differentiates beings, such as the base and the refined." These differences don't come from anything outside of *kamma,* which is why *kamma* is the biggest issue facing the beings of the world. Why is it big? Because each of us is constantly creating *kamma.* Even if we don't think that we're creating it, the good and bad results that come from our *kamma*—from each of our actions—can't be stopped as long as we're still creating it.

What is *kamma?* The word *kamma* means action. It's a neutral term. Our thoughts are called mental *kamma;* our words, verbal *kamma;* our deeds, bodily *kamma.* In each of these cases, we are the ones who constantly give rise to these things, so how can we expect to prevent their results from following as good and evil? And as we're constantly producing good and evil, the phenomena we produce come to wield power over our hearts and can support them or force them to be born and live in any place on any level of existence at all. There's no power acting over and beyond the results—termed *vipāka*—of the *kamma* we ourselves have made. *There's no power greater than the results of our own actions.* These results are what help us or oppress us after the *kamma* has been done.

This is what the principles of the religion teach. They don't have us believe in anything outside of the good and bad activity of our thoughts, words, and deeds, called *kamma.* This is where our insurance, our guarantee lies. So this, and only this, is what can either destroy or help us. Nothing else can destroy or help us at all.

Our bad thoughts, words, and deeds are the means by which we destroy ourselves. Our good thoughts, words, and deeds are the means by which we help and foster ourselves. The way by which we can ensure that we won't fall into undesirable situations lies here, and only here—in the principle of *kamma.* There's no power higher than this, which is why we shouldn't harbor unreasonable fears about this or that. Otherwise we'll end up like the rabbit who thought the sky was falling—even though we say we follow the Buddha, the model of insight and discernment.

The things we should fear most are any thoughts, words, and deeds that create dangers for us. We should realize that the true danger is what's coming out in our thoughts, words, and deeds right now. If we aren't willing to come to our senses and straighten ourselves out, these acts will constitute the most serious danger we face, not only now but on into the future, until the *kamma* we've done reaches the end of its power and efficacy. That's when the danger and suffering will end.

If we believe in the religion, we have to believe in the principle of *kamma* and the results that spring from it. Is there anyone among us who has gone beyond creating *kamma?* No one at all. Each of us has to create *kamma.* Whether or not we believe in the religion, we're all creating *kamma.* It is a principle of the nature of action inherent within us, a principle of cause and effect correctly taught by the Buddha when he said that all of us have our *kamma. We can believe this or not as we like, but that has no power to erase the truth of kamma.* There is no way that either *kamma* or its results can be

erased. *Kamma* has to remain as *kamma* and give good or bad results throughout each lifetime. There's no power above the *kamma* and its *vipāka*—its results—that come from our own good and bad actions. So we shouldn't harbor blind and unreasonable fears. *If you're afraid of hell, you should be afraid of the pit you're digging right now in your heart. That's the important one, the real pit of hell!*

The factor that causes the fires of hell to burn you is right there in your heart. So come to your senses and use mindfulness to focus on—and discernment to investigate and straighten out—the tools of your mind that are either thinking wrongly and creating danger or else thinking rightly and creating inner quality within your heart. Make your choices here and follow them through carefully so that there will be no more dangers for you or any of the other beings of the world.

So then. Is or isn't the religion a necessity? Right here is where we should decide. The person who taught us the religion—the Buddha—fully knew the ways of *kamma* and its results. There's no way you can dispute with him. He knew everything of every sort concerning his own *kamma* and that of other living beings, as well as the results of his own *kamma* and that of all living beings throughout the three levels of the cosmos. There's no one else who can even try to reach the full extent of his knowledge of *kamma*. This is why he proclaimed these truths for us to hear so that we can conduct ourselves without error—unless of course we go against his teachings by doing things that are bad, so that the results end up going against our wishes and lead to disappointment and suffering. Right here is where the basic principle lies.

Which is why I said: *If we in the world have the teachings of the religion in our hearts, then even if we meet with suffering large and small, we'll have a place to put them down.* It's like a disease. If we can treat

it with medicine, instead of simply letting it follow the full course of its strength, there's a chance for us to recover.

Riches Within

When we all live in our own separate places, there's nothing much to make us stop and think. But when we get crowded together, crowded together, more and more crowded together, we become a society of suffering: homes of suffering, villages of suffering, cities of suffering—each city full of blatant suffering—and then it spreads out to the nation: a nation of suffering, a world of suffering. And what would it be like with people all over the world like this? Who would want to live in such a world of suffering? When people are crowded together, it triggers a powerful sense of suffering within the heart. But if each of us lives separately and suffers in private, we don't hear much of one another's crying and misery, and so the world seems a bearable place to live.

When we go into a hospital, we feel differently from when we live as we normally do. As a rule, we don't usually feel too greatly affected by suffering, but when we go into a hospital—which is a

gathering place for all kinds of suffering—and we see the patients and hear their moans and cries, it's hard to feel happy and cheerful.

As soon as we visit a hospital, our hearts feel not just a little unsettled. For the most part, the people who visit hospitals are suffering from mental pain as they visit the people suffering from physical pain who fill the beds with hardly a room left empty. Physical pain and mental pain are gathered together and fill the place. As for the patients, they're suffering mentally and physically, while their relatives and friends suffer mentally—the visitors, for the most part, are suffering mentally. In every room you enter, the beds are lined with patients: nothing but people suffering in body and mind. Cornered. At the end of their rope. When you visit them, you're visiting people at the end of their rope. It's really disheartening.

Every hospital, in addition to being a place for people at the end of their rope, is also a place where people die and their bodies are kept. It's not the case that everyone treated there gets well and goes home. When the disease proves too much for the patient to bear, too much for the doctors, nurses and medicine to handle, the patient has to die. This has happened in this bed and that, in this room and that. Every bed has been a deathbed, every room has been a death room, has kept a dead body on its way to being buried or cremated—but we hardly ever stop to think about it. If we were to let ourselves think off the beaten track a bit in this way, we might start to wise up and come to our senses somewhat, instead of being heedless and complacent the way we normally are.

Even when we enter a home, any home, and go into the kitchen, which is a constant crematorium for animals day in and day out, we should be able to reflect on the transitoriness of life, because that's what kitchens have been—crematoriums for animals of all sorts—for who knows how long. But we think of the animals as food, which is why these places never strike us as crematoriums. Whatever meat

we roast or stew is the flesh of a dead animal, so it's all a matter of cremation. But instead we think, 'It's food,' so we don't like to view the kitchen as a crematorium—but the only difference is in how we look at it.

The way we look at things can make us happy, sad, disgusted, fearful, brave—all from the way we see them. *This is why the Buddha taught us not to be complacent.*

The day we all went to distribute things to the refugees in Nong Khai: As soon as they saw us coming, they came pouring out, their eyes fixed on us in a combination of hunger, thirst and hopes fulfilled, all at the same time. And then when we were distributing the things… Oho! It made you feel so sorry for them, really sorry for them. I don't know where they all came from—every direction—filling the entire field until there was no room left for anyone to pass through: people suffering pain and hardship, with hardly anyone there to give them help. As soon as they saw that good-hearted people had come to visit, their hopes rose that at last they'd get help—because this is what necessity had driven them to. The same would have been true for us had we been in their place. They couldn't help it. They had to come pouring out, young and old, men and women, filling the place.

When they had received our presents—things to help relieve their suffering—they were so happy, both because their hopes had been met and because their suffering would be eased. For example, even though that night was just as cold as the nights before, still they would feel warmer than on the nights before when they hadn't had any blankets. The same with food: Just as their food was running out, more food had come, together with clothing, enough to give them some comfort and to relieve their worries to some extent. They couldn't help but feel happy—because after all, we hadn't taken just a few things to give them. We handed out a lot, until it seemed that every family there was satisfied. Who wouldn't feel glad?

This is the clear sort of result that comes from making donations, from being generous. The object we give leaves our hand as a willing sacrifice, from pure motives, and then it's there in the hand of the other person. It leaves the hand of the donor and appears in the hand of the recipient. The donor is happy, the recipient is happy—some of them even start crying, as we saw that day, whether from happiness or what, it's hard to guess.

This is the power that comes from helping one another, something with a great deal of value in the area of the heart. However much gladness results—after all, some people will feel very glad, others will simply feel good that today things are a little less of a hardship than before because they have food and blankets to protect them from the cold; some will have to think of the donors with gratitude, because all of us differ in the depth and strength of our feelings… But at any rate, the recipient feels proud with the pride of receiving, the donor feels proud with the pride of giving, which is why generosity has been something essential for the world all along.

Generosity means giving, making sacrifices. It's something that people have been doing since time immemorial. If we were to stop being generous or making sacrifices for one another, the world wouldn't be able to last as a world—because even animals are generous with one another, just like human beings. They share their food with one another just like we do. They live together and eat together, feeding their offspring and caring for them. Take ants, for example: Each one helps carry food back to the nest. Other animals take food back to their hole or their hollow in a tree and eat it together.

We human beings live in families, in society. However much we're involved with others, that's how much we make sacrifices for one another, beginning with the sacrifices that parents make for their children and on out to those we make for society at large. We live together by being generous, by making sacrifices for one another.

Our hearts and our lives depend on one another, which is why we must do this.

Our Lord Buddha, from the very beginning when he was developing his perfections for the sake of Buddhahood, made a practice all along of giving gifts, of being generous, until his good name spread far and wide in every direction because of his generosity. Once he had gained Awakening and become Buddha, people made offerings, gave him gifts as an act of generosity everywhere he went. Even heavenly beings performed acts of generosity for him. Wherever he went, things would appear on their own, without his having to ask for them. People kept feeling moved to bring him offerings and gifts, to the point where one day a group of monks had gathered and were saying, "Wherever the Buddha goes, people honor him and bring him heaps of offerings. This is due to the power of his Buddhahood."

The Buddha happened to overhear this, and so went to correct them. "The fact that people bring so many gifts wherever I go doesn't come from the power of my Buddhahood. Instead, it comes from the power of the generosity I've practiced all along. Even my Buddhahood has come from the various forms of goodness, beginning with generosity, that I've worked hard to develop. It didn't arise on its own, complete with its powers, simply from my being a Buddha. Even Buddhahood has to come from developing goodness, such as the perfection of generosity, before one can be a Buddha." That's what he told them.

For this reason, generosity is not only a basic prerequisite for human society, but it also develops as an ingrained habit for those who practice it. People who like to be generous want to keep on being generous wherever they go. It becomes a habit ingrained in the heart. And especially when there's someone to teach them and help them understand the benefits of generosity: The habit then develops even further until the desire to make sacrifices becomes a perma-

nent part of their character. In addition, wherever they go, wherever they're born, they're never lacking or poor. This is because of the power of the generosity they've practiced in previous lifetimes.

Ven. Sivali, for example: Wherever he went, the streets and villages would be full of people wanting to present him with gifts—nothing but gifts all over the place, everywhere he'd go. He was second only to the Buddha in terms of the gifts people gave him. In his previous lifetimes, he had been an avid donor. Wherever he went, generosity was a basic part of his character. It was something he really enjoyed doing. No matter how rich or poor he was, he never stopped being generous. All he asked was that he have enough to share, and then he'd share it without hesitation. He never held anything back. This then developed into an ingrained habit with him. As a result, when he ordained and attained the Dhamma as a disciple of the Buddha, he was foremost among the disciples in terms of the gifts and offerings he received. No one else, except for the Buddha himself, could match him in this respect. This was all because of his ingrained habit.

This is why the various Arahant disciples excelled in different areas: Each of them had developed habits emphasizing different aspects of inner goodness. There were many of them who, after becoming Arahants, didn't receive a lot of offerings or respect from people, but they excelled in other areas—all of which were aspects of the inner goodness that had helped them attain the Dhamma and gain release from suffering. But the outside results still showed: Even though they had attained Arahantship, there weren't large numbers of people to present them with gifts in keeping with their attainment. This is because they had developed other sorts of ingrained habits instead.

An ingrained habit is something implanted deep in the heart, something we've done so consistently that it comes naturally to us,

without anyone having to tell us—something we feel comfortable and right about doing, something we simply *want* to do, of our own accord. This is the point where it's called an ingrained habit.

Just now I started out by talking about suffering. Every person has his or her suffering, yet when we live in our own separate places and go our separate ways, our suffering isn't much to speak of. When we get crowded together in large numbers, though, our suffering increases and becomes more and more pitiful, more and more appalling, to the point where the whole nation becomes one great mass of suffering. No one would want to live in such a world. And why should they? It'd be nothing but a mass of suffering.

When we refer all of this inward to ourselves, we can see that we each have our own mass of suffering and stress at all times. What do we want for the sake of this heap we call our 'self'? The whole thing is nothing but a mass of suffering and stress. If we want to escape from this suffering without any lingering attachments to anything, if we see suffering as a great threat to ourselves, then we have to accelerate our efforts. We have to be solid, steady, and stable in all that we do—everything of every sort. Our efforts, our exertion, our persistence, our powers of endurance have to be great because of our desire for release. Our mindfulness and discernment try to find approaches for examining things so that we can get past them step by step.

But if we're complacent, that's not the way it is with us at all. As soon as we meet with a little bit of pleasure, we get complacent, just like a foolish person with his money: As soon as he earns a little bit, he spends it all on his own amusement, with no thought of trying to save it. Whether the things he buys are necessary or not, he doesn't care, just as long as he can buy them. He spends without holding anything back, without thinking at all, and so becomes an habitual spender without any thought for what's reasonable or necessary. When he finally reaches a dead end, there's no way out. He sinks

into misery because of the poverty that comes from being extravagant, from being a spendthrift, from thinking only of the immediate present and not taking the long view. And this is because he hasn't got the intelligence to prepare for the future.

As for people who use their discernment, they spend their money only when necessary. When they buy anything, it's because they see its necessity—and they really benefit from it. What they put away as savings is for the sake of real necessities in the future. This is what it means to be discerning. Here we're talking about external wealth.

The same sort of thing applies to amassing internal wealth, too. As far as external wealth is concerned, we make sure we have enough to get by in the world, enough to keep the body going without suffering from poverty. We make sure that our homes and the other necessities on which the body depends are enough for us to get by. As for our inner necessities—i.e. noble wealth *(ariya-dhana)*, the wealth lying beyond the reach of all dangers and enemies—this refers to our inner worth, our inner quality, which no one else can steal or run off with.

If there are still any seeds within us that will lead to our being reborn on any level, in any place, in line with the affairs of our defilements, we should try at least to have inner worth, inner goodness, on which we can depend so that we won't suffer too much—so that we can get by and keep going. This is an important resource or an important tool for making our way along the path to the land of security.

Weakness is something with which we create obstacles for ourselves, one after another, so that we don't gain the benefits we should be capable of. This is why we're taught to abandon it—because weakness, laziness, taking the easy way out, are all affairs of defilements, and not any sort of Dhamma that can give us shelter or security.

The affairs of the Dhamma are the exact opposite. Every word, every phrase of the Buddha's Dhamma teaches us to consider things. To take the initiative. To be diligent, hard-working, and persistent. To contend with things no matter how heavy the task. All we ask is to know the reason for going to a certain point, for following a certain path, and then we'll try to go, no matter what the difficulties may be. This is the way of sages. This is the sort of fighting spirit they have. They never say things like, 'It's too hot…too cold…I don't feel like doing it. It's too early…too late…I don't feel up to it.' They never say these things at all.

To say these things is a sign of a lazy person, finding excuses to tie himself down. When it becomes a question of doing good, people like this find nothing but problems with which they create thorns and obstacles in their path so that they're left with no way to go. As a result, they end up lying on their bed of thorns. When they prepare their bed, they don't think about what they're doing. All they think about is ease and pleasure in the present. But as for the suffering that will come from that ease and pleasure, they don't give it a thought, which is why they keep running into things they don't want, over and over again.

As for wise people, they use their mindfulness and discernment to evaluate things, to gauge the consequences until they see them clearly. Then they advance, with no thought of turning back. Even if it means death, they're ready and willing. After all, everyone in the world has to die. Every living being in the world has to go. No one—not a single one of us—is going to be left. *So if we're going to die, let's die well.* If we have to make an effort, it's something we can do while we're still alive. After we die, there's nothing we can do. If we're going to correct our faults, we should do it while we're still living, because after we die we can't correct them at all: This is what reason teaches us.

So try to correct your faults. Correct them until they're all gone, and then you'll be released from their penalty—like a prisoner who is released from his penalty, released from jail, and attains freedom. The heart released from the penalty of its faults, from its inner *kamma,* becomes a free heart. Freedom is ease. We, when we're free, are infinitely at ease. There's no one who can come to force or coerce us. Compared to what it is now, the heart when it's free is a hundred thousand times more happy and serene—to the point where nothing at all can compare!

Who wants to be anyone's servant or slave? And yet when we're slaves to the defilements, we don't seem to mind, which is why we're caught in their trap, why we're forced to suffer hardship and pain. We should see them as our enemies and then wrestle with them until we come out winning. The heart will then be free in and of itself. Fight without stopping! Don't retreat. No matter how many defilements may be lording it over the heart, they can all be dethroned through the power of your combat, your resistance, your destruction of them. The heart then becomes free.

When the heart becomes free, there's nothing—nothing but happiness and serene security. There's nothing more easeful than freedom of the heart.

'I go to the Dhamma for refuge'—to the Dhamma, surpassing the world, which arose from the Buddha's right practice. That same right practice is the path that will take us to the security of that Dhamma.

'I go to the Sangha for refuge.' The noble disciples have followed the path ahead of us, and we're following it in their wake. They have all gained release from suffering and caught up with the Buddha. We follow in their footsteps with our right practice. Wherever we live, we have Dhamma in our hearts. The defilements fear a person with Dhamma in the heart. Don't think that they don't. The defilements

contain both fear and bravery in themselves, and because they're found in our hearts, we feel both fear and bravery in line with them. But once we're really rid of them, there's no bravery, no fear—just the evenness, consistency, and constancy of excellence at all times. This isn't a matter of defilement; it's a matter of the genuine Dhamma. That's what it's like.

So we must try to accelerate our efforts. Our breath keeps running out each second. Even though it keeps coming in and out, in and out, as if it weren't running out, still it's running out in line with the principles of its nature, bit by bit, step by step, and there's nothing we can do to get it back. When it keeps running out, running out, it finally reaches the point where it really runs out and there's no breath left to us. When there's no breath left to us, what do they call us? They say that we're 'dead.'

When you die, I ask that you die only in body. Don't let the inner goodness, the inner worth in your heart die, too. Make sure that your heart has inner worth to hold to, because the heart is of vital importance. It's your greatest treasure. Make sure you try to nourish and enhance it through your efforts so that it shines within you. As the Buddha says, the superlative treasure is the heart.

All our other possessions are simply external things we depend on from day to day. Don't dismiss them: Everyone alive has to depend on external things to nourish and support the body so that it will develop and grow. But ultimately we have to depend on the goodness that's the essential core of the heart to establish us securely in the life after this, as long as our defilements aren't yet over and done with.

When our defilements are done with—through the effort of our practice that has reached a state of fullness, penetrating ultimate facts, ultimate causes and effects—that's the end of the problem of repeated death and rebirth. Our heart becomes a great treasure just

like the treasure the Buddha awakened to. When the noble disciples reached the Dhamma, it was this same great treasure. They no longer had to spin around like whirligigs, taking birth and dying, dying and taking birth like we do to the point where we ourselves can't keep track of the times. Who knows how we could count them? It's like following the tracks in a cattle pen: You can't tell which tracks are old ones, which ones are new, because they're all over the pen. How could anyone follow them? They turn here and turn there, cross over one another this way and that. Wherever you go, wherever you look, there's nothing but cattle tracks all over the place—because the cattle trample all around in there day and night, day after day. You can't tell which tracks are going in, which ones are going out, because the cattle are stuck there in the pen with no way to get out.

Death and rebirth, death and rebirth: They happen over and over again like this all the time, to the point where we can't keep track. When there's death and rebirth, there's also the stress and suffering that come part and parcel with them. When we cut the cause of death and rebirth, there's no more 'over and over again.' This is what the final cessation of stress and suffering is like.

When we use our mindfulness and discernment to evaluate things and build up plenty of inner goodness, when we work constantly at developing both inner wealth and outer wealth, we're said to be wise. As long as we're alive, we can depend on these things as we lead a life of inner worth, calm and at peace because of the goodness we've developed. When the time comes for us to be separated from our material wealth—such as the body, which we regard as one of our most important possessions—we can then depend on our inner wealth, the inner worth we've developed, as the basic capital for establishing ourselves on a good level in a good rebirth. This is in keeping with the fact that inner worth acts as a supporting factor for

the person who has developed it by doing what's good. In one of the basic tenets of the Dhamma it's said:

"*dhammo have rakkhati dhammacārim*"

"The Dhamma protects the person who practices it" from falling into evil places. What are evil places? Places no one would want to go. What causes people to be born in such places? Evil, that's what.

When you realize this, you should do your best to develop goodness so that you can go to a good place and have your hopes fulfilled. In other words, develop inner goodness within the heart. Don't be complacent or heedless of the fact that days, nights, months, and years keep passing by, passing by. Make sure that your goodness develops smoothly and consistently. The important point lies with you. It doesn't lie with the days, nights, months, and years. You have to regard yourself as the crucial factor. How are you going to develop yourself through the various forms of goodness so as to be safe, secure, and at peace? Try to develop goodness to the point where it meets your needs, or to the utmost of your ability. This is called clearing the path that goes the good way—both now and in the future—instead of creating brambles and thorns on which to cut yourself and get hurt.

When we go the good way, we meet with joy. *Idha nandati:* We find joy in the present life. *Pecca nandati:* When we leave this life, we find joy in the next life. We find joy both in this world and in the next. We meet only with rewarding things through the power of the inner worth we've developed in our hearts. Wise people develop nothing but goodness in this way, which is why they meet with nothing but goodness and discover only good things to pass along to us—as the Buddha did. He searched for what was good and so found what was good and passed it along to the living beings of the world. Even up to the present day, these good things—the teachings he brought out of the truth of the Dhamma—have yet to run out.

His teachings were accurate and correct, in line with cause and effect, in line with the truth, the principles of the truth. As for us, we're like the deaf and blind. If we don't place our trust in people with good eyes and ears, whom will we trust? Ignorance is heaped full inside us. Darkness and blindness fill our hearts and we don't know which way is the way to go. Days, nights, months, and years keep passing away, passing away, but our ignorance won't pass away unless we work to strip it away—which is why we have to strip off the blindness of our own ignorance and foolishness so that our minds will be bright and able to see the path.

The Buddha had outer eyes and the inner eye, outer intelligence and inner intelligence, so we should place our trust in him in line with the phrase we repeat, 'I go to the Buddha for refuge.' Get so that it goes straight to the heart. Straight to the heart! Place your life in his hands by following the practice like a warrior, like a student trained by a master.

The teachings of the religion lead to this point, step by step, from the very beginning. The Dhamma, you know, can be said to be broad, but can also be said to be narrow—because it all comes down to one point: the heart. The heart is what experiences both good and evil. The heart is what does good and evil, and the results—good and bad, pleasant and painful—all come down to the heart. This is why the Buddha taught,

"*mano-pubbaṅgamā dhammā*"

"The heart comes first," the heart is chief, the heart is the principle factor. All dhammas come down to the heart. They don't lie anywhere else. So this is where we should straighten things out. Get so that the heart is shining and bright.

The body is something filled with suffering and stress, but the heart can be filled with happiness. This is where they differ. The body is pitch dark in line with the crudeness of its elements, but the

heart can be dazzlingly bright through the power of the Dhamma. This is where the heart becomes a 'Dhamma element': when it's fully bright within itself because absolutely nothing is left to obscure it.

So. Get rid of its stains. Wash them away. It will then be fully bright in a way that blankets the cosmos. This one heart is the only thing with a power this great. It blankets the whole cosmos, with no sense of too near or too far. It's always just right through its own gentleness, its own brightness: so gentle that there's no word to describe it, so bright that it blankets the cosmos in radiance by day and by night. This is called '*aloko udapādi*': The dawning of light within the heart.

Everything within us, everything in the world, comes down to this one heart. The important essence lies here and nowhere else. So make an effort to free this heart, to straighten it out in line with your abilities—or to the utmost of your abilities. You'll then come to possess a rewarding treasure within the heart: the great, extremely rewarding treasure of the heart's own purity.

I ask that you take this and contemplate it well. The treasure for which you have hoped for so long will one day be yours and yours alone.

That's enough explanation for now, so I'll ask to stop here.

Tranquility, Insight & Ease

People, for the most part, look after their bodies but not after their minds. This is why, even though they may experience physical pleasure to some extent, they don't have much mental pleasure to speak of. *The major factor, the mind, rarely feels pleasure even when there's pleasure in the minor factor, the body.* The body is a minor factor when compared to the mind. The mind is the major factor in each person, but instead of taking good care of this major factor, this basis for the body, we hardly ever look after it at all.

If the mind weren't more solid and lasting than the body, it would have disintegrated long ago, and wouldn't have been able to oversee the body as long as it has. But the reason it has been able to is because it's solid and lasting enough to stand up to the onslaught of the various things that are always coming into contact with it—namely, the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations that come flowing in through the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, and

gather in at the mind in the same way that all rivers flow together and gather into the sea.

All sorts of worthless and filthy preoccupations come flowing into the mind at all times, turning it from something precious into a trash basket. This is why we can't find any marvels, any happiness in it at all. So, to receive training in the Dhamma of the mind is something very important for this major factor within us. If the mind has Dhamma, has reason within it, then whatever it displays in word and deed is correct and good, and will seldom ever fall off target.

Whatever our actions, they'll seldom fall off target. The heart will be happy, and the body at normalcy. If diseases arise in the body, they won't cause any trouble that will have an effect on the mind or create any sort of mental illness within it.

But when defilements fill the heart, they make it troubled and upset. If you simply complain about the effects without removing the causes, it won't serve any purpose at all. For this reason, the right way to act is to *make sure you don't waste your birth as a human being.* How many years have passed from the day of your birth up to the present? How many months and years have you experienced? How much work? How much suffering? How much have you gained from all the various things you've encountered? Have you ever tallied these things up to see how much you've profited or lost? When you leave this life and head for the next, what will you have to hold to as basic provision for what lies ahead?

The work of the world is something you can do till you die, and you'll never come to the end of it. No matter what, you'll have to let go of it and die. The day you die: That's when you'll be free as far as the work of the world is concerned. This is the way it is for everyone. No matter who we are, no matter where we live, none of us is free. We're free only to die. Why? Because death transcends all our work, which has to be abandoned at the moment of death.

If we wait for free time in which to provide for the mind, we'll never be free *until the day we die.* That's when we'll be free: free to die. So while we're still alive and able to evaluate things both within us and without, we should hurry and make an effort in all activities that will be to our benefit. *There is still time to start*—and in particular, to meditate. This is an extremely important food and sustenance for the mind. It's called Dhamma—Dhamma medicine—medicine that can cure the mind of its restlessness and anxiety, giving rise instead to the pleasure of peace because we have the food of the Dhamma to nourish us.

As the first step in training the mind, we're taught to choose one Dhamma theme or another as a means of controlling and curbing the mind. Otherwise, it'll go straying off to its old habitual preoccupations, causing suffering and stress to the point where we're constantly disturbed and distracted. This is why we're taught to meditate on *buddho, dhammo,* or *sangho;* to be mindful of the breath; or to combine *buddho* with the breath, thinking *bud* with the in-breath and *dho* with the out: whichever theme seems most suited to our temperament.

In focusing on these things, you should center your awareness exclusively in the heart. For example, when you focus on the in-and-out breath, make yourself aware of each time the breath comes in and each time it goes out until the end of the time you've set to meditate. You can center on the feeling of the breath at any point at all that seems most prominent in your awareness. *Whichever point the feeling of the breath is clearest*—such as the tip of the nose—*is the point you should center on, the point you should be mindful of.* Make sure you know when the breath comes in and when it goes out. If you want, you can combine it with *buddho,* thinking *bud* with the in-breath and *dho* with the out. Keep your attention exclusively with the breath. You don't have to go thinking about any other issues

outside of the work you're doing—centering on the breath—right now in the present.

This way, as mindfulness gradually becomes more steady and continuous, the mind won't have any chance to slip out after the various preoccupations that can cause it harm. It will settle further and further into stillness. At the same time, the breath—which was crude or blatant when you first began paying attention to it—will gradually become more and more refined. It may even reach the stage where it disappears altogether from your sense of awareness. This is because it's so refined—*so refined that it disappears.* At that moment there's no breath *and only awareness remains.* This is one of the things that can happen in your meditation.

The heart at that point is very quiet *and very amazing.* The breath has disappeared without leaving a trace, and the body disappears at the same instant. What this means is that it disappears in your sense of feeling, not that the actual body goes away anywhere. It's still sitting right there, but your awareness isn't involved with any sense of 'body' at all. *It's simply awareness pure and simple, entirely on its own.* This is called 'a quiet mind.' The mind is its own self on this level and develops a strange, uncanny, and amazing feeling of pleasure.

As soon as the mind becomes quiet and disentangled from all activities, *there's no sense of time or place,* because the mind isn't labeling anything with thoughts of time or place at all. *There's simply awareness maintaining itself in that state.* This is the feeling of pleasure that can come from meditation. You can, if you want, call it one of the fruits of meditation.

For those who repeat *buddho* as their theme, the same sort of thing occurs. If you focus on *buddho* without coordinating it with the breath, simply be aware of each repetition of *buddho, buddho, buddho.* You don't have to go thinking about how the results are going

to appear. Maybe someone has tried to scare you, saying, 'Watch out. If you meditate, you may get a vision like this or like that, and then you'll go crazy.' There are lots of people who say things like this, but for the most part they themselves have never meditated. They just like to go around saying such things to scare people—to scare the people who are ready to believe things of this sort, because they're people of the same sort: quick to believe such things, quick to get scared, quick to find excuses for being lazy so that they end up never meditating at all. So watch out for people with views like this, as there are all sorts of un-Buddhist notions lurking around in Buddhist circles. Don't say I didn't warn you.

If you have any of the inner sense of judgment and reason that comes from having meditated, you won't believe these sorts of comments. Why? Because the Buddha, in teaching the world, wasn't teaching it to go crazy. He wasn't a crazy teacher, so how could he teach the world to be crazy? When people who practice the Dhamma follow it correctly in line with the principles he taught, how can they go crazy? It's out of the question. So don't be fooled into believing such things or you'll miss out on a precious opportunity.

Now, it can happen that people *do* go crazy when they meditate *because they deviate from the Dhamma* and let their minds stray away from the principles taught by the Buddha. For example, while they're repeating *buddho, buddho, buddho* to themselves, they send their minds out to see this or know that, and then get so carried away with what they see that they forget their meditation-word and start believing their visions. When this happens, it can lead to bad results. Yet even though people like this go crazy because they've deviated from the principles of meditation and of the religion, other people take it as an excuse to go around criticizing the religion and saying that meditation will make you go crazy.

Actually, when you meditate, there's nothing much you have to do. Simply focus on repeating *buddho, buddho, buddho* in the mind. You don't have to paint pictures in your imagination that heaven is like this or Nibbāna is like that, that heavenly beings are like this or that, as you've learned from books. People who have actually seen heavenly beings have seen them with their intuitive knowledge in line with the principles of their knowing nature—but we see them through our imagination, speculation, and guesswork.

Sometimes we actually fool ourselves with our own picture-painting because we like that sort of thing, and once we fool ourselves the result is craziness: a mind wild and restless, with no Dhamma principles to hold to. Some people of this sort actually go insane, so this is a pitfall we should watch out for.

Thus you shouldn't speculate about results at all. Simply work away at the repetition of your meditation-word. This is the work that, once it becomes continuous, will gradually produce results, step by step. There's no time or place that will give rise to results while you meditate unless you do the work—i.e., unless you think of your meditation-word in this way.

This is the important principle, the principle that underwrites your meditation. If your mind and meditation-word keep in contact with the breath, you can be sure that nothing frightening or unnerving will happen. The lies that people who have never meditated will tell you about meditation are simply a smokescreen, that's all. There's no truth to them. The truth is what I've told you just now in line with the principles of the Dhamma the Buddha taught. So begin meditating in the way I've explained, and you won't go crazy. Instead, you're sure to gain nothing but intelligence in dealing both with your inner and your outer activities—and at the same time, you'll develop splendor in your heart.

As for those who practice mindfulness of breathing, there's one important point I didn't fully explain just now, and that's when you meditate to the level where the breath becomes refined—more and more refined, more and more refined—and the mind is aware of it stage by stage to the point where the breath disappears, leaving nothing but awareness pure and simple: It may happen that you start to get worried, which is another way you can fool yourself. So I'd like to insert a few remarks here so that you'll understand.

When it happens that the breath disappears from your sense of awareness, you might begin to worry, 'If the breath disappears, won't I die?' If you think this, you're scaring yourself. And when this happens, you're sure to become afraid that you'll die, the breath will immediately reappear, and that's as far as you'll get. Things won't get any more refined than that. So to get past this obstacle, you should tell yourself, when the breath disappears during your meditation, that 'Even though the breath may disappear, the mind is here with the body, so I won't die.' This is enough to get rid of the problem of your fear of death at that point, which is simply a momentary distraction.

Actually, when you fall asleep, which is like dying, you don't pay any attention to whether or not the breath disappears—and you don't die. When you meditate, your awareness is much more alert and refined than that, and you know that the breath has disappeared because of the alertness of your meditation, so you should have your wits about you even better than when you fall asleep, *but instead, you get afraid. This shows that you're not up on the tricks of the defilements.*

So to be up on their tricks, you should remind yourself of the truth: 'The breath has disappeared, but the mind is still with the body, so I won't die.' *Just this is enough to make the mind break through to a more refined level* where the whole body disappears together with the breath. They won't impinge on your awareness at all. This is called reaching the point of refinement in breath meditation. Some

people can stay here for hours, others don't stay very long. It all depends on the strength of the individual meditator.

What you'll gain as a result in that moment is the refinement of the mind that's simply aware, all by itself—*simply aware of itself at that moment,* not involved with any preoccupations at all. This is called 'singleness of mind.' If the mind isn't involved with any object at all, so that only awareness remains, that's called singleness: at one with its awareness, *not paired with any object, not paired with any meditation-word at all,* because at that point it has completely let go of its meditation-word. All that remains is awareness staying there by itself. This is called singleness of mind.

This is the way meditation develops as it becomes progressively clearer and clearer to the heart of the person doing it. If you actually follow the principles of the Lord Buddha's Dhamma, there's nowhere else you can go. You'll have to come to the truth. In other words, the results you receive will have to follow in line with the causes you've practiced correctly. However much pleasure you receive when the mind settles down, *it will immediately hit you:* 'This is what pleasure is'—because the pleasure you feel in the heart at that point is unlike any other pleasure you've ever experienced. It's a pleasure more uncanny and amazing than any other pleasure in the world.

This is why the religion has lasted up to the present. If it weren't for this, it would have vanished long ago, because its flavor would have been no match for the flavors of the world. It wouldn't have had any solid worth, any marvels to compete with the world at all. It would have folded up long ago because no one would have been interested enough to keep it going up to the present.

But the fact that it *has* lasted is because it's more worthwhile than any of the worlds on the three levels of the cosmos. Even just the stage of the quiet mind lets us see something of the marvels that lie within us, in our bodies and minds. Never before have we ever

seen the strange and amazing things that come from that quietness, but now that we're meditating and the mind becomes quiet, there they are.

And now that these results appear, we start becoming persistent. We make the effort. We have the time—all of our own accord—because we've gained conviction from the results we've clearly seen. The question of finding time, finding a place to meditate or quiet the mind or make an effort in the area of the mind, is now no longer a problem. Once the mind is content to do these things, it finds time for these things of its own accord. *This is one step in the course of meditation.* This is the way it is when we meditate: We have to practice so as to reach the level of meditation *where the mind becomes still.*

Next comes the level of discernment. This is genuine 'insight meditation.' It's a common expression among people that they're going to practice insight meditation, or *vipassanā.* Actually, *vipassanā* means clear insight that comes from having investigated with discernment. The word meditation covers both tranquility and insight meditation, but usually we say we're going to practice *vipassanā* or insight meditation when we actually mean simply that we're going to meditate.

Actual insight meditation means to contemplate and investigate. Once the mind becomes quiet and peaceful, it's bound to develop approaches to use when we make it investigate and analyze the physical properties and *khandhas,* or the topics of inconstancy *(anicca),* stress *(dukkha),* and not-self *(anattā).* We've read in the texts that 'Wherever there's inconstancy, there is stress. Wherever there's stress, there is not-self.' We've seen other people grow old, die, and be separated from their loved ones—*but we should realize that we too are subject to separation, we too are inconstant, stressful, and not-self just like them.* We have to bring these truths inward to ourselves. We grow older day by day, day by day. From the day of our birth, we've

kept growing progressively older and older, changing step by step. This is inconstancy.

Pain and stress have stuck right with us ever since the day we were born. The moment we came out of the womb, we fell unconscious. We were in shock because the pain was so great. Some infants die in the womb, some die the moment they leave it because they can't take the great pain. Pain and stress have been right here with us, from the time we were small up to the present—so where are we going to harbor any doubts about inconstancy, stress, and not-self? These things are heaped on top of us at all times.

'Inconstancy' means changing with every moment. Even now: You've been sitting here for just a little while and already you're tired. The body has changed. It's changed from what it was, and has begun to ache.

Not-self. What in your body and *khandhas* can you hold to as having any lasting worth? The body is simply an assemblage of the four properties of earth, water, wind, and fire, and that's all. As for the *khandhas,* there are five. *Khandha* means group, heap or assemblage. The first *khandha, rūpa,* refers to the body. *Vedanā* refers to feelings of pleasure, pain or neither pleasure nor pain. These are another group or heap. *Saññā* refers to acts of recognizing and labeling things. *Sankhāra* refers to thought-formations. *Viññāṇa* refers to the consciousness arising whenever the eye meets with a visual object, the ear meets with a sound, and so on. Altogether, these things are called the five heaps.

So where is there anything of substance in these five heaps to which you can hold to, saying, 'This is me'? *This is what insight meditation is: separating things out to find the truth,* the truth in our own bodies and minds. But because we're ignorant and unable to see the truth, we say that 'This is me... That's mine.' When any of these things change, we become sad, upset, and depressed. There are lots

of people who become mentally ill because of this—because their thinking goes all out of bounds.

'Mental illness' here means the mental distress or turmoil we all suffer from, not necessarily the heavy mental illnesses where people lose their senses and go out of their minds.

When we investigate, separating the properties and *khandhas* with our discernment in this way, we'll see that our discernment can develop techniques and approaches capable of cutting away defilements stage by stage, until they can cut away all defilements connected with the five *khandhas.*

When we say, 'That's me... This is me,' it's because the mind and *khandhas* seem to be one and the same, and we can't tell them apart. When discernment has analyzed and investigated them through the power of the intelligence it has developed to a high level of skill, it can tell these things apart. It knows, 'This is the body... This is feeling... This is mental labeling... This is thought-formation... This is consciousness.' The body is the body, this thing is this thing, that thing is that—*but we're not this thing or that.* We can tell them apart, separate them out, step by step, until we can separate the mind out from the defilements and effluents *(āsava)* that lie buried within it, and there's nothing at all left in the mind. This is where it's called truly *buddho.*

The result of practicing meditation, when we reach the final stage, is that the mind becomes truly *buddho,* just like the *buddho* of the Lord Buddha. This doesn't mean the same *buddho* as his. Instead, it means that in comparing them, while the purity of ours is equal to the purity of his, the range of the Buddha's is greater than ours as disciples, in line with the greater power of his potential and capabilities, which are issues outside the question of purity.

A person's capabilities can be known by hearing his teachings. The Buddha's intelligence has to be in line with his level, that of the

disciples is fully in line with theirs, but as for the question of purity, they are all equals. The Buddha taught, 'There is nothing superior to one with no evil.' From the Buddha down to his final Arahant disciple, their purity is equal, with no gradations at all. *Right here is where the similarity lies.*

This is the result of developing the mind through meditation. We practice it step by step, removing defilements step by step until they are all absolutely gone, leaving nothing but purity. This purity is what experiences the ultimate level of ease. *There is nothing higher than this form of ease.* It's called the highest transcendent quality, *a quality transcending the world.*

'Transcending the world' means that it transcends the physical properties, transcends the *khandhas,* transcends everything. *There is nothing to surpass this thing that is pure.*

This is the fruit of meditation. The Buddha attained it before anyone else in the world in those days and has led the way for all Buddhists who practice in his footsteps, down to those of us practicing right now.

The Buddha taught the religion reasonably, in terms of cause and effect. We should follow in line with the principles he taught, and the effects—the results—are sure to appear accordingly. *Where the causes exist, the results have to appear.* If people practice correctly in line with the Dhamma principles he taught, how will they *not* meet with the results?

The Dhamma is a well-taught Dhamma, not an empty-handed one, so how can those who practice it not reap results? When people say that the paths *(magga),* fruitions *(phala),* and Nibbāna have disappeared, where have they disappeared?—aside from disappearing from those who aren't interested in the practice. Even in the time of the Buddha, these things didn't exist for those who weren't interest-

ed. But they did exist for those who were—for those who practiced in line with the principles the Buddha taught.

The same holds true for the present. The middle way is always right in the center of the truth, right on-target, always appropriate for removing defilement. No matter which defilement, no matter what sort, it can't escape the power of this middle way at all—which is why this way is a Dhamma absolutely right for removing the defilements of the beings of the world. It's called the middle way. The middle way now and the middle way of the Buddha's time: How can they differ? *There's no difference between them at all,* because they're the same well-taught Dhamma. The defilements are the same now as they were then. The middle way, the tool for removing them, is the same now as it was then. When we use it to eliminate the defilements, how can they not fall away? The power of our correct practice in line with the principles of the middle way will have to give the same results now as it gave then.

But the paths, fruitions, and Nibbāna don't exist for those who don't practice, no matter what the time or era. They exist only for those who do—and they appear in greater or lesser measure in line with the strength of each individual's practice. That's all there is to it.

This is called the well-taught Dhamma, the Dhamma that leads those who practice it away from suffering and stress, step by step, until they are absolutely released. There is nothing to surpass the Dhamma of the Buddha in completely removing defilement from the heart. This is why we can be confident in our practice.

There is no one in the world who can speak more correctly and accurately than a teacher with no more defilements, a teacher who speaks entirely from the truth. The Buddha never spoke dishonestly or deceptively in the way of the world, for things like deception are an affair of defilement. The Dhamma is something that has to be

spoken forthrightly, straightforwardly, in line with the truth. When people practice in line with the truth, how will they not know the truth? They have to know.

This is where the greatness lies. It doesn't lie anywhere else. So don't go doubting and groping around like blind people oblivious to the Dhamma, the Buddha's representative, filling our nation.

In conclusion, I ask that you all take this and think it over. If anything I have said here is too hard-hitting for your ears or hearts, I ask your forgiveness, because today's Dhamma has been Forest Dhamma.[1] I hope it will be of at least some use to you all.

1 Dhamma learned from the practice, rather than from the study of books.

Right Here *in* the Heart

When you listen, pay close attention to your heart, for that's where the Dhamma lies: in the heart.

At first, before I had practiced, I didn't believe that the Dhamma lay with the heart. 'How could that be?' I thought. 'The Dhamma comes with making an effort in the heart. That sounds better than saying the Dhamma lies with the heart.'

'The Dhamma lies with the heart. The Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha lie in the heart. All dhammas lie in the heart.' I didn't believe this. 'All 84,000 sections of the Dhamma lie in the texts:' That's how I felt—how I felt at first. But as I kept listening to my teachers explain things, none of them ever deviated from this point: 'The Dhamma lies in the heart. The Dhamma lies with the heart.' As I kept listening to this, my mind gradually settled down and grew still.

At first, whenever I'd listen to a sermon, I'd focus my attention on the speaker, instead of keeping it focused on myself. 'Don't focus your attention outside,' they'd say. 'Keep conscious of what's going

on inside yourself. The Dhamma being explained will come in and make contact with you on its own.' I wouldn't listen to this. I kept focusing my attention on the speaker. In fact, I'd even want to watch his face as he talked. It got to the point where if I didn't watch his face, didn't watch his mouth as he talked, I didn't feel right. That's how I was at the beginning.

But as time passed, I came to find that stillness would appear in my heart while I was listening to the Dhamma. That's when I began to believe: 'The Dhamma of concentration does lie right here in the heart.' I began to have my witness: myself. So from that point on, I wouldn't send my attention anywhere outside while listening to a sermon. I wouldn't even send it to the speaker, because I was absorbed in the stillness in my heart. My heart would grow still as I listened—cool, calm, and absorbed. This made me believe, 'They're right. The Dhamma does lie with the heart!'

I began to believe that the Dhamma does lie with the heart when the Dhamma of concentration—mental stillness and calm—appeared in my heart as I listened to the Dhamma This was what made me want to keep on listening as a means of stilling and calming the heart.

As time passed and I continued my meditation, then whatever results would appear as I practiced sitting or walking meditation, *they would all appear in the heart.* They didn't appear anywhere else. When the mind wasn't still, then whatever was getting me all worked up was there in the heart. I'd know, 'Today my mind doesn't feel right.' It would be distracted and restless in line with its moods. 'Eh? Why is it that my mind doesn't feel right today?' *This made me interested from another angle.* I'd try my best to calm the mind down. As soon as it got back into place with its meditation, it would settle down and be still. This made the point very clear: *The Dhamma does lie in the heart.*

The world lies in the heart. The Dhamma lies in the heart. For this reason, when you listen to a sermon, you should keep your attention focused right inside yourself. There's no need to send it outside—to have anything to do with the person speaking, for instance. When you keep your awareness focused inside yourself this way, the Dhamma being explained will come in and make contact with your awareness.

The heart is what's aware. When the current of sound dealing with the Dhamma comes in and makes continual contact with the heart, the heart won't have any chance to go slipping outside, because the Dhamma is something calming and absorbing. This moment, that moment, it keeps you absorbed from moment to moment with the current of sound coming from the speaker. Step after step, it keeps making contact. The mind gradually becomes more and more quiet, more and more still. *This way you already start seeing the rewards that come from listening.*

And this is why, if you want to listen to the Dhamma in the right way for getting clear results, you have to keep your attention focused firmly inside yourself. There's no need to send it outside, *and no need to engage in a lot of thinking while you're listening.* Simply let the mind follow along with the current of Dhamma being explained, *and the Dhamma will seep into your heart.*

When the mind doesn't get itself worked up with thoughts about various things, it becomes still: That's all there is to it. *But to grow still, it needs something to counteract its thoughts.* It won't settle down on its own simply because you want it to. You have to use one Dhamma theme or another, or else the sound of Dhamma while a sermon is going on. Only then can it grow still.

Where is the greatest turmoil in the world? There's no greater turmoil than the one in the heart. If we talk about things murky and turbid, there's nothing more murky and turbid than the heart.

There's nothing at all that can compare with the heart in being troubled and pained. Even fire, which is said to be hot, isn't nearly as hot as the heart aflame with the power of defilement.

Defilements do nothing but make us suffer, step after step. This is why we're taught to see their harm, to be intent on keeping mindfulness established and to investigate things from various angles. When mindfulness and awareness keep in touch with each other, then our practice of concentration and our investigation of things from the various angles of discernment keep getting results—stillness and deft strategies—step by step.

For example, the Buddha teaches us: 'Birth is suffering. Death is suffering. These are Noble Truths.'

Birth is suffering, but we're pleased by birth. When a child is born, we're happy. When a grandchild is born, when our friends and relatives have children, we're happy. *We don't think of the pain and suffering the child goes through, surviving almost certain death in that narrow passage before being born.*

If we don't look at both the beginning point—birth—and the endpoint—death—so as to see them clearly, both these points will cause us unending joy and sorrow. Actually, the child has to survive almost certain death before it can become a human being. If it doesn't survive, it dies right then—either in the womb or in the moment of birth—because it's pained to the point of death. That's how we human beings die. Once we're born, then no matter what our age, we have to be pained to the point of death before we can die.

Pain is something we've experienced from the moment of birth, but we don't see it as a Noble Truth. Actually, it's something we should see as harmful, as dangerous and threatening, so that we can find a way to get past and go beyond it through our own efforts—and especially through the efforts of our mindfulness and discernment.

When we enjoy the beginning but dislike the end—when we like birth but dislike death—we're contradicting ourselves all the time. *And where can we get any happiness with these contradictions in the heart?* They have to make us suffer. There are no two ways about it.

So in order to put the beginning and end in line with each other, we have to contemplate the entire course of events—to see that birth is suffering, aging is suffering, death is suffering—to see that these are all an affair of suffering and stress. They're the path followed by suffering and stress, not the path along which *Nibbāna* or anything like it can progress *if we aren't skilled in contemplating them,* if we haven't investigated them until we have them thoroughly understood.

The Buddha teaches,

"*dukkhaṁ n'atthi ajātassa*"
"There is no suffering for those without birth."

When there's no birth, where will there be any suffering? When there are no seeds for birth, there are simply no seeds for suffering, so there is no suffering in the heart. This is why Arahants have no feelings of stress or pain in their hearts. They have no moods in their hearts at all. *There are no happy, sad, or indifferent moods in the heart of an Arahant.*

We're the only ones with feelings in our bodies and hearts. Arahants have all three kinds of feelings in their bodies, they feel physical pain just like we do, but their minds have no moods. The three kinds of physical feelings can't have any effect on their minds. Their minds aren't swayed by influences the way ordinary minds are. They know pleasure, pain, and neutral feelings in their bodies, but there are no moods in their minds—because they have gone beyond moods, which are all an affair of conventional truth. Their minds are pure, unadulterated Dhamma. Nothing can infiltrate them. Feelings of pleasure, pain, and neither pleasure nor pain are all inconstant,

stressful, and not-self—and so can't possibly get involved with the nature of a pure mind at all.

If you want your heart to prosper and grow, try to develop inner goodness and worth. Don't let yourself lapse in generosity and virtue. These are good qualities for nourishing your heart and connecting up with good states of rebirth. If you have a good foundation of inner worth as your sustenance, then no matter where you're reborn, that goodness will have to stick close to you so that you can look forward to a good destination.

As long as we haven't yet gained release from suffering, we're taught to exert ourselves and not to be lazy or complacent. If we're able to meditate so as to inspect our hearts, which are full of all kinds of stress and suffering, then we should keep right at it. Polish the heart every day. Polish it every day. When the heart is polished every day, it's bound to shine. And when the heart is shining, you're bound to see your reflection, just as when water is clear you can see clearly whatever plants or animals are there in the water.

Once the mind is still, you'll be able to see whatever poisons or dangers it contains, much more easily than when it's murky and turbulent with all its various issues, defilements, and effluents. This is why we're taught to purify the heart. In the teachings gathered in the *Pāṭimokkha* Exhortation, we're taught:

Never doing any evil,
Fully developing skillfulness,
Cleansing the heart until it is pure:
These are the Buddhas' teachings.

This is what all the Buddhas teach, without exception. Whatever is evil or debasing, they tell us not to do, and instead to do only things that are skillful, through the power of our own discernment. That's what 'fully developing skillfulness' means: fully developing discernment.

Cleansing the heart until it is pure is something hard to do, *but it lies within our capacity as human beings to do it.* The Buddha went through hardships, his disciples went through hardships, all those who have reached purity have had to go through hardships, but these were hardships for the sake of purity, for the sake of release—not for the sake of sinking in failure—*which is what makes them worth going through.*

The mind, when it's overcome with dirt and defilement, doesn't seem to have any value at all. Even we can find fault with ourselves. We may decide that we'd rather put an end to it all. This is because we're so disgusted and fed up with life that we're ashamed to show our face to the world. And all of this is because the mind is very murky and dark, to the point where it becomes a smoldering fire.

Life doesn't seem worth living when the mind is so dark, because things that are dark and worthless have overcome it. We can't find any real worth to the mind at all—which is why we think it would be better to die. But where will we get anything 'better' or 'good' after we die? Even in the present, nothing's any good. If things got better with death, the world has had people dying a long time now, so why isn't it any better than it is? There's no good to us: That's why we want to die. Once the heart is good, though, it has no problem with life or death, because it's already good.

Why does the mind seem so thoroughly worthless when it's overcome by worthless things?

When we wash these things away, step by step, the mind gradually starts showing some of its inner radiance. It starts growing peaceful and calm. The entire heart becomes radiant. Happy. Relaxed. Whatever we do—sitting, standing, walking, lying down or whatever work we do—we're happy with the pleasure that has appeared in the heart.

When the mind is peaceful and calm, then wherever we are, we're content. *The important point lies with the heart.* If the heart isn't any good, then no matter where we are, nothing is any good at all. We keep fooling ourselves: 'Over here might be good. Over there might be good. This lifetime is no good. The next lifetime will be better. Living is no good. Dying would be better.' We keep fooling ourselves. The troubled part of the mind: That's what fools us. The part that's stirred up with its various issues: That's what fools us. 'This will be good...That will be good,' but it's no good at all. No matter where we go, we end up the same as where we started—because *this* part is no good. We have to straighten it out, to make it good, *through our own efforts.*

Try to investigate and eliminate it by making a persistent effort. Practice concentration so that the mind can be still. *Force the mind at that point*—the point where you're practicing concentration. *The point when you're forcing the mind,* training the mind to meditate, *is not the time to let it go wandering as it likes.* We call this making an effort, being persistent—making a persistent effort to straighten out the mind, to uproot its enemies, until the heart can grow still. The heart grows still because our efforts force it to, not because we let it go wandering as it likes.

This is when we see the rewards or the value of our efforts, because the heart has been brought to stillness through our efforts, and stays that way through our efforts step after step. The value of effort becomes more and more apparent, in line with the worth of the mind appearing as the result of that effort.

So, when the time comes to investigate in terms of discernment, focus on investigating so as to see things clearly. Contemplate everything in the world so as to see it in line with its truth. The world may be infinitely wide, but when the mind is obscured by defilement, we're caught in the most narrow and confining thing there is. It's

confining right here. Whether you sit or lie down, there's no comfort at all. Wherever you go, there's no comfort, because the mind is confined. It weighs on itself. So open it up right where it's confining and give it space to blossom and be bright. It'll then feel free, calm, and at ease.

This is the point where you can investigate stress and pain, because the mind now has the strength to investigate. It's ready and willing to investigate because pain is a whetstone for sharpening discernment. Concentration and discernment are what we use to slash defilements and mental effluents away. Discernment is what uproots them, but concentration is what first catches them and ties them down.

Concentration stills the mind and gathers it into one point of focus so that it doesn't get scattered around to the extent that you can't catch hold of it at all. Once the mind is gathered into one point of focus, discernment opens it up and unravels it to see clearly where its concerns and attachments lie—with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, or with form, feelings, mental labels, thought-formations, and consciousness. Discernment takes these things apart to see them in thorough detail, in line with their truth as it actually is.

Discernment contemplates these things, investigates them, over and over again. These are the points where it travels. These are its whetstones. The more it investigates them, the more it branches out, step by step, understanding things for what they are and letting them go. *Letting them go means putting down the burdens that weigh on the heart under the sway of attachment.*

What is the mind thinking about? What good does it get from its thoughts? The moment a thought forms, it disbands. A good thought? It forms and disbands. A bad thought? It forms and disbands. Whatever the thought, it forms and disbands. These are

called thought-formations. They form. They arise. They disband. Their forming and disbanding happen together. They arise and disband in the same instant. So how can we attach any sense of self to these things—to this arising-disbanding, arising-disbanding?

Investigate pain, which is something we all fear. Everyone fears the word 'pain,' so how can we hold onto it as us or ours? Are you going to persist in holding to this mass of pain as 'you'? To hold to it as your self is to hold onto fire to burn the heart. Know pain simply as pain. *What knows the pain isn't the pain.* It's the heart. The heart is what knows all about the pain. When pain arises, the heart knows. When pain remains, the heart knows. When the pain disbands, the heart knows. *It knows through its discernment.* Discernment sees clearly, distinctly, that *pain is pain, and what knows is what knows.*

Mental labels. However much we can recognize and label things, we forget it all. If we want to remember, we have to recognize and label again. The mind makes a label that then disbands in the same instant. *Can this be our self?* We recognize and label, and then it disbands, disbands, disbands, arises and disbands, arises and disbands like everything else. Can this sort of thing be our self? Can this sort of thing be ours? *If it's us, if it's ours, then we're wriggling all the time* because of mental labels and pains. Mental labels arise and disband. Pains arise and disband, arise and disband, giving us trouble and turmoil without let-up, without stop. This is why we have to investigate so as to see the conditions—the *khandhas*—that arise and disband all around us, all around the heart.

Consciousness. How long have we been cognizant of sights and sounds? Ever since birth. And what lasting worth have we ever gained from these things? As soon as we're cognizant of anything by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue or body—Blip!—it disbands in the same instant, the very same instant. So what lasting worth can you get from it? Nothing at all. Can sights be our self? Can sounds? Can

smells, tastes, tactile sensations be our self? Consciousness—the act of noticing whatever makes contact: Can this be our self? It takes notice—Blip! Blip! Blip!—and immediately disbands. Immediately disbands. Can this be our self? *There's no way it can be.*

How can we hold to this arising and immediate disbanding as our self? How can we put our trust in these things? They arise and disband, arise and disband. Are we going to persist in holding to this arising and disbanding as our self? If so, we're in a turmoil all day long!—because these things are arising and disbanding all the time. No matter whether they're form or feeling—pleasure, pain or indifference—mental labels, thought-formations, or consciousness, they're constantly arising and disbanding, each and every one of them. So how can we grab onto them as us or ours even though we know full well that they arise and disband? This is why we have to use discernment to investigate them so as to see clearly what they really are and to let them go for what they are.

What knows doesn't disband. The true mind—what knows—doesn't disband. Whatever disbands, it knows, *but this knower doesn't disband.* All that disbands is what appears and disbands in line with its own affairs. Form, feelings, mental labels, thought-formations, and consciousness, for example: These are all natural conditions that come under the three characteristics.

The three characteristics are inconstancy, stress, and not-selfness. How can we hold to things like this as us or ours? If we investigate into their causes and effects using our mindfulness and discernment, *there's no way we can hold onto them.* Only when our defilements are thick, and the mind hasn't investigated—and doesn't know what's what—can we be deluded into becoming attached. Once we've investigated so as to see these things for what they really are, the mind lets go of its own accord.

When the time comes to go into battle—*when the time comes to die*—take these things as your battlefield. In particular, feelings of pain will stand out more than anything else when things start to break apart. *Take pain and the mind as your battlefield.* Investigate them so as to see their truth. No matter how great the pain may be, it doesn't go past death. Pain goes only as far as death. The body and *khandhas* go only as far as death, *but the heart doesn't go only as far as death. It goes past death,* because the heart has never died. It lies above all these things. Pain is pain only as far as death. It doesn't go past it. No matter what feelings arise, they go only as far as their disbanding, and that's all. Whether they're very painful or only a little painful, the mind keeps knowing, knowing at all times.

When there's mindfulness, the mind keeps knowing each stage of the pains that appear. What knows doesn't disband, so why should we be worried and concerned about pains, which aren't us or ours? They're just conditions that arise. They depend on the mind for their arising, but they aren't the mind. They depend on the body for their arising, but they aren't the body. They're just feelings. Pains, for instance, are something different, something separate from the body and mind: That's their pure, unadulterated truth.

If we don't try to go against the truth, the mind can reach peace through its investigation of pain, and especially at the last stage, at the break-up of the body. Give it your all! See what disbands first and what disbands after—because what knows will keep on knowing. Even when everything else has disbanded, what knows still won't disband.

This is our investigation. All it takes is for you to see causes and effects in this way just once, and your courage in the face of these things will spring right into action. When death comes, you'll immediately take a fighting stance. You'll take your stance as a warrior going into the battle between the *khandhas* and the mind. You'll

investigate, using your discernment. You'll take mindfulness and discernment as your weapons in slashing down to the truth. And when you've slashed everything down, where will you end up? Right there with the truth.

Use your mindfulness and discernment to slash down to the truth of everything of every sort. *When you reach the truth, everything will be leveled. Everything will be still.* Nothing will be left to disturb the heart. If anything is still disturbing the heart, *that means you haven't investigated fully down to its truth.* Once you've reached the full truth in every way, there's nothing that can disturb or provoke or incite or jab at the heart at all. There's nothing but a state of truth penetrating everywhere. This is called being leveled down and made still by the truth—through the power of mindfulness and discernment investigating to see things clearly.

Right here is where the Buddha and his Arahant disciples—all those who have gone beyond suffering and stress—have gone beyond: right where suffering and stress exist. And where do they exist? In this body. These *khandhas.* This mind. When we take things apart, we take them apart right here. When we know, we know right here—right where we were deluded. Wherever we don't know, mindfulness and discernment—our tools for slashing our way into the truth—will make us know. There's nothing to equal mindfulness and discernment in breaking through to the endpoint of all phenomena, in washing away all defilements and absolutely eliminating them from the heart. They are thus the most advanced tools for dealing with defilements and mental effluents of every sort.

So put mindfulness and discernment to use when you need them, and especially when you're about to go. There's no one else who can help you then. Even if your relatives, parents, brothers, sisters, wife, husband, children are all thronging around you, none of them can help you at all. *Everything depends on you.* As the Buddha

says, "The self is its own mainstay." Realize this in full measure! What can you do to be your own mainstay *and not your own enemy?* If you bring out nothing but weakness, confusion and lack of discernment, you're being your own enemy. If you use mindfulness, discernment, conviction, persistence, and courage in line with the principles taught by the Buddha, investigating down to the causes and effects, the facts of all the conditions of nature, that's when you're truly your own mainstay.

So find yourself a mainstay. Where can you find it? 'I go to the Buddha for refuge:' This reverberates throughout the heart and nowhere else. 'I go to the Dhamma for refuge' reverberates through the heart. 'I go to the Sangha for refuge' reverberates through one and the same heart. The heart is their vessel. *The Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha are all gathered into this one heart*—because the heart is the most appropriate vessel for all dhammas. Get so that you see this—and especially so that you see that *the whole heart is the Dhamma in full.*

So cleanse your heart. If you can make it gain release at that point, so much the better. You won't know where to ask about the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. You won't ask—for you'll have no doubts. You'll simply look at the awareness showing its absolute fullness inside you: What that is, is what they are. The Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha are all one Dhamma—one single, solid Dhamma.

These are the results of the practice of eliminating our defilements and mental effluents from the very beginning, when the heart had no worth, when it was filled with nothing but the excrement of greed, anger, and delusion. Wash away that excrement by using the principles of the Dhamma. When it's all gone, the heart will become Dhamma. Once it's Dhamma, it's infinitely at ease. Wherever you go, you're at ease.

'Nibbāna is the ultimate void.' Whatever is annihilated in that void, this is where you'll know. Whatever is still there, this is also where you'll know. Who can know this better than one without defilements?—for the Buddha, in saying that Nibbāna is the ultimate void, *was speaking from his absolute freedom from defilement.* He said this from having seen Nibbāna. But we haven't seen it yet. No matter how much we repeat his words, we just stay where we are. Investigate so that you really see it. The saying, 'Nibbāna is the ultimate void,' will no longer be any problem, because it'll be fully clear to the heart: what is annihilated and what's not.

'Nibbāna is the ultimate ease.' Listen! The ultimate ease here isn't a feeling of pleasure or ease. Instead, it's the ease that comes with the absolute purity of the heart, with no arising or disbanding like our feelings of pleasure and pain. *This has nothing to do with the three characteristics.* The ultimate ease that's a constant feature of the pure heart has nothing at all to do with the three characteristics, nothing at all to do with inconstancy, stress, and not-self, so it doesn't change. It always stays just as it is.

The Buddha says Nibbāna is constant. What's constant? The pure heart, and nothing else: That's what's constant. Get so that you see it, get so that you know!

I'll ask to stop here.

The Supreme Attainments

Now I'm going to describe the gathering place of all things—goodness and evil, happiness and suffering—so that you'll know exactly where they all converge. Tune in your receivers well and you'll come to know that everything converges at the heart.

Darkness lies here. Brightness lies here. Ignorance and delusion, knowledge and discernment all lie here in the heart. The heart is thus like a single chair on which two people are waiting to sit. If one of them sits down, the other has to stand. But if they share the chair, they each get to sit on separate parts of it. The same is true of the ignorance and discernment dwelling in the one heart. Even when we're ignorant or deluded, we still have some knowledge. Even when we know, there's still some ignorance infiltrating the heart. This is why we say the heart is like a single chair on which two people are waiting to sit. One heart, but ignorance and knowledge have infiltrated different parts of it. Whichever one is stronger will get to sit there more than the other. The techniques for training the heart

and developing every form of goodness and virtue are thus meant to rid the heart of the things that cloud and stain it.

When we're taught about ignorant people or intelligent people, we hear and understand. When we're taught about ordinary run-of-the-mill people and their thick defilements, we know and understand. When we're taught about the Noble Ones *(ariya puggala)*, from the first up to the highest levels, we know and understand step by step. Even though we ourselves aren't yet able to be like them, we're curious and want to hear about the goodness they've developed and the path of practice by which they developed it—how they practiced so as to attain those levels of Dhamma.

In the beginning, the Buddha and his Arahant disciples—those who practiced and came to know following in his footsteps—started out as people with defilements just like ours. They differed, though, in that they were unflagging and persistent in developing themselves so as to wash away the dark, obscuring things in their hearts. They kept at their practice steadily, without stopping or abandoning their efforts. As a result, their hearts—which were being nourished with the good fertilizer of their wise actions—gradually developed step by step until they were able to attain that highest of the supreme attainments, the fruit of Arahantship.

The term "Noble One" means a supreme person—supreme because the Dhamma he or she has attained is supreme. There are four levels: Stream-enterers, Once-returners, Non-returners, and Arahants.

The texts say that those who have attained the level of stream-entry have abandoned three fetters: self-identity views, uncertainty, and the fondling[1] of precepts and practices. *Self-identity views,* as ex-

1 The word 'fondling' in Thai also means to harp on something or be continually worried about it. These meanings come into play in the following explanation.

pressed in terms of the factors of body and mind *(khandhas),* take twenty forms with each of the five *khandhas* acting as a basis for four of the forms. For example you may see the body (your physical body) as your 'self', or your 'self' as the body, the body as existing in your 'self', or your 'self' as existing in the body. Altogether these are four. Or you may see feeling as your 'self', or your 'self' as feeling, feeling as existing in your 'self' or your 'self' as existing in feeling—another four. In the same way the *khandhas* of perception, thought-fabrication, and consciousness each form the basis for four forms, which can be inferred from the above examples. In other words, each of the five *khandhas* acts as the basis for four forms of these views. Four times five equals twenty forms of self-identity views.

According to the texts, Stream-enterers have abandoned these absolutely, but the practice of 'Forest Dhamma' differs somewhat in this point. Other than that though, there are no points of disagreement. So I'd like to insert a few of the observations of 'Forest Dhamma' here, in hopes that they won't act as an obstacle to your reading. If you see that they don't form the path to release in line with the well-taught Dhamma, please let them pass so that they won't form a hindrance in your heart.

To summarize briefly, people who have absolutely abandoned the twenty forms of self-identity view are those who don't see the five *khandhas* as their self, their self as the five *khandhas,* the five *khandhas* as existing in their self, or their self as existing in the five *khandhas.* Now it would seem perfectly reasonable to say that people of this sort would also no longer be interested in sexual relationships, because sexual relationships are a matter of the five *khandhas,* which are the nest of the twenty forms of self-identity view that have yet to be abandoned absolutely.

As for those who have abandoned them absolutely, the physical body no longer has any meaning as an object of sensual desire. Their

feelings no longer indulge in sensual desire. Their perceptions no longer give meaning to things for the sake of sensual desire. Their thoughts and imaginations no longer create objects for the sake of sensual desire. Their consciousness no longer acknowledges things for the sake of sensual desire. *In short, their five khandhas no longer function for the sake of sensual desires or for any worldly relationships whatsoever.* Their five *khandhas* must then change their functioning to another level of work that they see is still unfinished. In other words, they are raised to the level of the five subtle fetters: passion for form, passion for formless phenomena, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance.

The ability to absolutely abandon the twenty forms of self-identity view would thus appear to fall to Non-returners, because only on their level is the heart finished with its attachments to sensual desires.

As for Stream-enterers, the way in which they know and let go of these views, as I understand it, is in line with the following analogy: Suppose there is a man traveling deep into the forest who comes across a pond of clear, clean, fresh-tasting water. The water is covered with duckweed, though, so it isn't completely visible. He parts the duckweed and sees that the water looks clear, clean, and inviting. He scoops up a handful of water to taste it and then he knows that the water in the pond is really fresh. With that, he drinks from the pond in earnest until he has satisfied the thirst he has felt for so long and then continues along his way.

Once he has left, the duckweed moves in to cover the water as before. As for the man, even though he has left, the memory of the water always stays in his mind. Every time he enters the forest, he goes straight to pond, parts the duckweed, and scoops up the water to drink it and bathe himself to his heart's content whenever he wants. Even though the water is again completely covered by the

duckweed when he goes away, the convictions that are firmly implanted in his heart—that the pond is full of water, that the water is clean and clear, that its taste is absolutely fresh—these convictions will never be erased.

The man in this analogy stands for the earnest meditator who uses discernment to investigate the various parts of the body until they are fully clear. The mind at that moment lets go of the body, feelings, memory, thought-fabrication, and consciousness, and enters a pure stillness of its very own, with absolutely no connection to the *khandhas.* In that moment, the five *khandhas* don't function in any way at all related to the mind. In other words, the mind and the *khandhas* exist independently because they have been absolutely cut off from one another through the persistent effort of the meditation.

That moment is one in which there arises a sense of wonder and amazement that no experience ever, from the day of our birth or the beginning of our practice, can possibly equal. Yet now we have come to see this marvel appearing right then and there. The mind stays in that sense of stillness and ease for a period of time and then withdraws. Once it withdraws, it reconnects with the *khandhas* as before, but it remains firmly convinced that the mind had reached a realm of radical stillness, that the five *khandhas* (body, feelings, perception, thought-fabrications, and consciousness) were completely cut off from it during that time, and that while it remained in that stillness it experienced an extremely amazing mental state. *These convictions will never be erased.*

Because of these firm, unshakeable convictions—which become fixed in the heart as a result of this experience and can't be affected by unfounded or unreasonable assertions—we become earnest in resuming our earlier meditation, this time with firm determination and a sense of absorption coming from the magnetic pull that these convictions have in the heart. The mind is then able to settle down

into stillness and ease, and to rest there for periods of time as before. Even though we can't yet release the heart absolutely from the infiltration of the *khandhas,* we are in no way discouraged from making a persistent effort for the higher levels of the Dhamma, step by step.

As for the qualities of Stream-enterers' hearts, these include unshakeable conviction *(acala-saddhā)* in the results they have clearly seen from their practice and in the higher levels of Dhamma they have yet to know and see; and impartiality *(samānattatā),* free from prejudice and pride with regard to people of any class. Stream-enterers have Dhamma in charge of their hearts. They don't hold to anything over and above what they see as correct in line with the principle of cause and effect. They accept and immediately put into practice the principles of truth and are unwilling to resist or disobey them. No matter what nationality, class, or race individual Stream-enterers may belong to, they are open and impartial to all people in general. They aren't disdainful even toward common animals or people who have behaved wickedly in the past, for they see that all living beings fall into the same lot of having good and bad *kamma.* They understand that whatever sort of *kamma* we have, we must accept it in line with the actions we have performed and the truth of what we have done. If anyone makes assertions that are reasonable and correct, Stream-enterers will immediately take them to heart without making an obstacle out of the speaker's past, race, nationality, or social standing.

If what I have said here is correct, then there would be nothing about a Stream-enterer's searching for a spouse that would be in any way inconsistent with the fact that he or she has yet to abandon absolutely the twenty forms of self-identity views that are the nest of sensual desires. The abandoning of self-identity views is no obstacle to Stream-enterers' having families *because the absolute abandoning of these views lies on an entirely different level.*

I ask that you as meditators take the well-taught Dhamma as your guide and compass and put it into practice until you give rise to knowledge and vision from within yourselves. That knowledge will then become your own personal wealth. This way you will come to know that although your work is on one level, and the work of the Noble Ones on another, the results in both cases are of the same sort. Just as with external work: Whatever the work, the resulting income in each case is money of the same sort. Whether it's a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, or more, you know clearly that the money is the fruit of the work to which you have devoted your efforts. Whatever the amount, it's a source of security to you—better than guessing at the amount of money in someone else's pocket or arguing among yourselves about how much other people have, which serves no purpose either to the winner or to the loser of the argument and reduces the worth of your right to see the Dhamma directly for yourself, a right that was granted by the Buddha as his legacy to those who practice.

Uncertainty—the second fetter—refers to doubts, specifically doubts about whether there is rebirth or annihilation after death. If there is rebirth, will we be reborn on the same level as before? As something else? Can a person be reborn as an animal? Can an animal be reborn as a person? When people and animals die, where do they go? Is there really such a thing as good and bad *kamma?* When *kamma* is made, does it yield results? Is there really life after death? Are there really heavens and hells? Are there really paths, fruitions, and Nibbāna? All of these questions lie in the realm of doubt and uncertainty. Stream-enterers can abandon them because they have seen the basic principles of the truth in the heart that these questions have as their underlying cause.

Concerning the principles of *kamma* and its results, Stream-enterers are convinced of them in a way that is firmly implanted

in their hearts and can never be removed. At the same time, they have the same sort of firmly planted conviction in the Buddha's Awakening and in the fact that the Dhamma is well-taught and capable of leading those who practice it to release from all suffering and stress, step by step.

The principal truth of the laws of nature is that nothing in the world disappears without a trace. There is simply the continual change of every type of fabrication *(sankhāra)* that is not in its original, elemental form back into those original elements that constitute its own natural state. These basic elements then transform themselves from their original nature back into disguised forms, such as animals and beings. These beings, which are driven by the force of defilement and have differing senses of good and evil, must then be constantly performing good and bad actions *(kamma).* Their good and bad actions can't be erased; and in the same way, the results of their actions—which those who do them will have to experience as pleasure and pain—can't be erased either. Only those who have eliminated all seeds of becoming and birth from their hearts will be done with the problems of birth and death, because the doing of good and evil actions and the experiencing of their good and evil results have as their basic source the seeds of becoming and birth buried deep in the heart. Except in the cases where these seeds are removed, the principles of action or *kamma* lie beyond the power of people to affirm or negate them, in the same way that night and day lie beyond the sway of the events of the world.

The third fetter—*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*—is usually translated as fondling precepts and practices. This fondling comes from the fact that one's precepts and practices are undependable. To express this with an analogy to sons and daughters, the term '*parāmāsa*' or fondling would apply to sons and daughters who can't be trusted by their parents and who keep causing them worry and suffering. One

example would be a daughter who doesn't preserve her honor as a woman and reduces the worth of her gender. She likes to go out and attract men, selling before she buys. She falls for whoever admires her beauty and spends herself freely without a thought for her future value as a wife. Wherever she goes, she leads men around on a string, like the strings of fish and crabs they sell in the market, but in the end this *parāmāsa* woman is the one who gets caught up on her own string. A daughter of this sort is called a *parāmāsa* daughter because men all over the place get to fondle her, her parents have to be burdened with scolding and teaching her over and over again, and because she likes to engage in selling herself, which is a cause for shame and embarrassment to the family.

As for a son, he can cause worries to his parents in other ways. One example is when he behaves irresponsibly. Instead of going to class at school, he likes to go roaming about looking for women wherever his friends may take him, without letting his parents or teachers know of his whereabouts. He looks for the sort of fun and amusement that's called "sneaking the fruit from the tree before it's ripe." After a while the teachers sense that something is up. Because the boy hasn't shown up for classes a number of days running, they suspect that he's playing truant at home. When they go to his home and ask his parents, the parents are stunned and answer in surprise, "We thought he was with you. We didn't pay any attention because we assumed he was at school." So the issue gets all blown up because neither the parents nor the teachers know what the boy has been up to. The fire he started for his own pleasure and amusement thus spreads to consume both his parents at home and his teachers at school. This causes his parents not just a little pain and distress. For this reason, a son of this sort is called a *parāmāsa* son. His parents have to suffer repeatedly, to scold and teach him repeatedly, with never a moment when they can close their mouths in peace. They

have to keep worrying in this way without ever being able to eat or sleep peacefully.

If we were to apply this term to husbands, it would mean a husband who can't be trusted. His wife is always afraid that he'll have an affair with another woman whenever he's out of her sight; that he'll go hitching up with a woman in the back alleys, and then bring nuclear fission home to burn his wife and children. This is because men in general are opportunists. They like to go out and attract women, taking advantage of any woman who's heedless and gullible. Men who don't regard their wives as important tend to be the type who are weak in the face of their sexual appetites. At first they see any bait, any woman, that comes floating along as their chance for a snack, but they forget to think of the fish that dies on the hook because it was attracted by the bait. So they let things follow their own course until they eventually come to ruin. If a man with a wife and family lets himself be ruled by his lusts and desires, he brings about not only his own ruin, but that of his family as well. Any woman with a husband who likes looking for snacks like this ends up with a heart heavier than a whole mountain. She can't live, eat, or sleep in peace. So a snacking husband like this should be called a *parāmāsa* husband because his wife must swallow tears together with her food because she is driven to constant suspicions by his behavior. She can never ever let go and relax.

If we apply this term to wives, it's the same sort of thing—a wife who can't be trusted by her husband. She is as fickle as a monkey and squanders his earnings. She's both his greatest love and his greatest enemy. After going out and searching for snacks at strange hours, like a bat, she comes home to raise a storm with her husband, accusing him of all sorts of things so that she can have an excuse to leave him and go live with her lover. Instead of doing her work as a housewife, she dolls herself up and casts furtive glances here and

there, looking for new boyfriends. If things get really bad, she takes the family's money and gives it to her lover to hire someone to get her husband out of the way so that she and her lover can then live together openly. A wife like this should be called a *parāmāsa* wife because she creates endless suffering and misery for her husband's heart. At the same time, she's a threat to his life, waiting to have him done in whenever she can get a chance.

If we apply this term to belongings, it refers to things, such as automobiles, that can't be depended on. Wherever you drive them, there's fear of danger. You have to check the motor every time you take them anywhere and keep taking them to the repair shop. Otherwise you can never tell when or where they'll flip over on you and trap you inside. All of this comes under the term *parāmāsa,* or fondling.

If we apply this term to precepts and virtues, it refers to the sort of precepts that stumble and fall because the people who observe them stumble and fall. People like this take their precepts, then break them, then take them again—taking them and breaking them over and over until they themselves aren't sure whether they're observing precepts or not, even though they keep taking them repeatedly. All of this refers to the precepts of ordinary people in general. Today they take the precepts and not too long from now they'll be taking them again. This is called the fondling of precepts and practices because they fondle their precepts the same way they'd pick at the scab on a wound.

Noble Ones on the level of Stream-Entry, even when they are lay people, are steady and firm in the precepts they observe. They don't have to keep taking them over and over again like people in general because they trust their intentions and maintain their precepts with care. They're not willing to let their precepts be broken or stained through any intentional transgressions. Even if they lead

groups of people in the ceremony of taking the precepts, they do it simply as part of their social duties and not with the intention to take the precepts anew to make up for any breaks or stains in their old precepts. Intentions like this don't exist in Stream-enterers at all.

Once-returners, according to the texts, have reduced the amount of greed, hate and delusion in their hearts. Practical experience doesn't raise any issues about these points, so we needn't discuss them any further.

Non-returners have abandoned five fetters: the three we've already discussed, plus two more—sensual passion and mental irritation. *Sensual passion* deals with the realm of the physical body. According to the observations of 'Forest Dhamma,' the twenty forms of self-identity views are the well-spring of sensual passion, so the duty of absolutely abandoning them falls to the Non-returner. This is because people who are to attain the level of Non-returning in full measure must use discernment to examine the five *khandhas* thoroughly and then pass beyond them with no lingering attachments. In other words, they must be able to examine each part of the body until it appears clearly to the heart both as being filthy and as being stressful, inconstant, and not-self, to the point where they know clearly that every part of the body is filled with filthiness.

The mental image of the unattractiveness of the body that appears outside the mind will then revert exclusively into the inner circle of the mind. They will know that attractiveness, which is a matter of the mind going out to paint pictures and then lusting for them, and unattractiveness, in which the mind goes out to paint pictures and then becomes disgusted with the nature of each part of the body, both converge into one and the same mind. In other words, they don't appear outside the mind as before. The mind fully sees the harm of the pictures it painted outside, and at the same time lets go of external attractiveness and unattractiveness as they relate to the

parts of the body it has been investigating. It absolutely withdraws its attachment to the body by passing through the interval where attractiveness and unattractiveness meet, showing no more interest in either of the two. At that instant the issue of sensual passion as related to the body is resolved.

As for *mental irritation,* practical experience doesn't differ from the texts or raise any issues, so we needn't discuss it further.

The fourth level of the supreme attainments is the level of Arahantship. According to the texts, Arahants have abandoned ten fetters: the five lower fetters we have already discussed, plus five more subtle ones—attachment to form, attachment to formless phenomena, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance.

Attachment to form doesn't refer to the form of the male or female body, or of physical objects on the blatant, external level. Instead, it refers to the mental images that appear exclusively within the mind—in other words, the images that revert from the outside back into the exclusive circle of the mind, as mentioned above. Meditators at this point have to take these images as the mind's preoccupation or as the focal point of the mind's attention. If you were to say that this means that the mind is attached to *rūpa-jhāna,* you wouldn't be wrong, because the mind on this level has to work at developing its understanding of these internal images so as to become adept in dealing with them, without being further concerned with the body at all. It has to keep at these images until it is skilled enough at creating and destroying them that they can appear and disappear in quick succession. Their appearing and disappearing, though, occurs exclusively with reference to the mind, and not with reference to external things as before when the mind was concerned with the body.

Even this appearing and disappearing of internal images, when it's subjected to the relentless scrutiny of mindfulness and discernment, gradually changes. Day by day it becomes faster and faster

until the images appear and disappear like flashes of lightning. Finally they are all gone—there are no images left in the heart at all. At the same time, you realize that these images pass away in the same way as all other natural phenomena.

From that point on the mind is absolutely empty and clear. Even though the body is still there, it seems to your awareness to be entirely empty, with no image of any sort remaining in the mind at all.

Attachment for formless phenomena means taking pleasure in subtle feelings of happiness or *arūpa-jhāna.* The practice doesn't have any issues to raise with this point, so we needn't discuss it further.

Conceit—belief in assumptions of self—is divided into nine sorts. For example, your level of attainment in the practice is lower than someone else's, and you construe it to be lower, higher, or on a par. Your level of attainment is on a par with someone else's, and you construe it to be lower, higher, or on a par. Or your level of attainment is higher than someone else's, and you construe it to be lower, higher, or on a par. All of these assumptions are mistakes if we speak in terms of the highest levels of Dhamma, because construings and assumptions are all matters of defilements. We have to correct this tendency until nothing at all appears as a conceit in the mind. That's when we can say that the mind is pure, because there is no more of this subtle unruliness left in it.

Restlessness, the ninth fetter, doesn't refer to the sort of agitation and distraction that's common to ordinary people in general. Instead, it refers to the diligence, persistence, and absorption of the Noble Ones in their work on this level as they use their sharp mindfulness and discernment to dig away in search of the source of the cycle of death and rebirth. The problem is that they aim at finishing their work quickly, in line with their hearts' strong hopes for the realm of release, and so don't pay much attention to questions of moderation or balance in their work.

What this means is that they tend not to let the mind rest in the stillness and ease of concentration, because the more they use their discernment to contemplate, the more clearly they see the way to remove defilements step by step. This makes them so absorbed in their work that they forget to rest their mind in the stillness of concentration in order to give their discernment renewed strength. In fact, they tend to view resting the mind in concentration and resting in sleep simply as delays in their work. As a result, the mind goes overboard in the pressure and absorption of its investigation. This is another way in which the mind goes wrong, and so counts as a mental fetter.

Ignorance (avijjā), the tenth fetter. If we apply this term to living beings in general, let me translate it in a forest monk's way as deluded knowledge, dishonest cleverness, both knowledge and ignorance mixed together so that you can't catch hold of which is which. This is ignorance on the blatant level.

As for ignorance on the subtle level of the higher mental fetters, 'Forest Dhamma' regards it as meaning one thing: *delusion regarding the one mind.* This is because on this level the mind is able to know and let go of everything else, but still remains deluded about itself. Thus this fetter is called *avijjā,* that is, incomplete knowing, unclear knowing, knowing with a blind spot still obscuring the mind. But when mindfulness and discernment that have been constantly trained to explore and investigate are sufficient to the task, only then will the mind realize that ignorance is simply the mind's own delusion about itself.

The moment discernment penetrates this truth, ignorance vanishes immediately, so that no form of ignorance remains lurking in the mind at all. The issues of restlessness, absorption in one's investigation, and conceit concerning the mind are resolved in the same instant that ignorance vanishes from the heart, because there

is nothing left that can act as a cause for restlessness or conceit of any sort. All of these issues in all three levels of the cosmos have nothing but ignorance as their sole primary cause.

Meditators who aren't really adept in the area of discernment will have great difficulty in finding their way out of ignorance, because ignorance in general and ignorance in itself are two very different things. Ignorance in general is a phenomenon that combines both external and internal delusions as a single defilement—similar to a tree, which is a combination of its various parts. As for fundamental ignorance, it's like a tree that has been felled and stripped of its branches. In other words, persistent effort cuts away at it step by step so that it gradually stops running wild through things at large and eventually converges into a single spot—the mind. This spot is the point of true ignorance, but at this stage it doesn't have the henchmen and followers it had when it was glorying in its full power.

This true ignorance is a gathering point containing all sorts of hidden, unexpected, and amazing things, in the same way that a tiny piece of bait can be contaminated with enough hidden poison to kill an animal. Of the contaminating factors that lie hidden in ignorance, I can give you only a brief explanation, for I can't think of any conventional realities with which to compare them that would be as near as I'd like to what they actually are. Among these contaminations are a radiance of mind so outstanding as to seem to be the finished product; a sense of happiness, springing from the power of the radiance dominating the mind, so amazing and wonderful that it seems to transcend the realm of all conventional realities; a sense of power and invulnerability so strong that there seems nothing capable of reaching in to affect it; a cherishing attachment for this phenomenon as if it were pure gold.

Although we don't realize the fact at the time, *these things are the obstacles blocking our progress toward true peace*. Only when we've

gotten past them and looked back in retrospect over the path we have followed will we realize where we went wrong and where we went right. That's when we'll know: "When we reached that point, we got turned around in our tracks or went astray… When we reached this point we were too attached to the stillness of concentration… When we reached that point we contemplated too much in the area of discernment. We didn't maintain a balance between our concentration and discernment, which is why our work went slowly at these various points." Once we have passed this point, we'll be able to review and understand everything in retrospect.

At the same time, once ignorance has vanished, we'll know what it is that gives rise to births and deaths in the future. From this point on, we have no more concerns for where we've come from in the past or where the future will lead us, *because in the present the mind has been severed completely from any connection of any sort with anything whatsoever.*

The Dhamma in this talk has been explained partly in line with the texts and partly in line with the observations of 'Forest Dhamma.' Wherever there are any errors, I ask the forgiveness of all my readers and listeners, for I've been talking in line with the understandings derived from the forest way in which I've been practicing. I'm always ready to listen to anyone who is kind enough to make reasonable comments or criticisms.

The various stages in the practice for giving rise to clear happiness and maturity within the heart—that is, training in meditation and other forms of goodness and virtue—are all mutually reinforcing. All things without exception that rate as forms of goodness are mutually reinforcing. We can make a comparison with hot peppers. Although some of them may be small or immature, if they're mashed into a paste, it's all hot in the same way, so that no matter which part of the paste we taste, there's no way of telling that the mature pep-

pers are in one part or the immature ones in another. In the same way, all things that rate as forms of goodness, no matter what type of skillful action they come from, will converge into one large measure of inner quality or worth.

For this reason I ask all of you who are fully intent on the Dhamma to put it into practice by modifying your actions in line with your position in life, to conform with the guiding compass of the Dhamma's path while you are still alive. When you come to the time that we all will have to face, your mind will have a firm basis to hold to and won't wander off in the wrong direction. It will follow the path of the Dhamma that leads away from suffering and guides you to happiness in whichever level of being your destination will be. The happiness and prosperity you dream of with each mental moment will become your heart's own wealth in line with its level. There's no reason to doubt this.

In conclusion, I ask that the qualities of the Triple Gem—the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha—preserve and protect each of you so that you meet with nothing but happiness, both in body and in mind. May whatever you hope for be realized in line with your every aspiration.

Nibbāna *is* Nibbāna

Nibbāna is Nibbāna. How could it be not-self? Inconstancy, stress, and not-self: These are called the Three Characteristics, understand? We contemplate these things for the sake of Nibbāna. We have to follow the path of inconstancy, stress, and not-self. When we've contemplated them from all angles, we let go, let go. When we've reached the level of not-self in full measure, we let go of not-self—and in that instant we reach Nibbāna. So why would not-self be Nibbāna? If not-self were Nibbāna, then Nibbāna would fall under the Three Characteristics, understand? That's why I said that Nibbāna can't be anything else. As for "self," that belongs to the realm of conventional reality. "Self" is a form of clinging. So how could "self" be Nibbāna?

As the Buddha said: *"suññato lokaṁ avekkhassu, mogharāja sadā sato"* and *"attānudiṭṭhiṁ ūhacca, evaṃ maccutaro siyā; evaṁ lokaṁ avekkhantaṁ, maccurājā na passati,"* which means, "Mogharāja, view the world as empty—always mindful to have removed any view about

self. This way one is above and beyond death. This is how one views the world so as not to be seen by Death's king." Removing views about self is part of the path. See? The Buddha has us remove views about self, so how could self be Nibbāna? Think it through. Inconstancy, stress, and not-self are the path we follow to reach Nibbāna. Our sense of self is a form of clinging. We have to contemplate self so that we can get past it. Only then will we reach Nibbāna. So why would Nibbāna be either self or not-self? Come on, think things through…

Nibbāna has to be Nibbāna. It can't be anything else. If you try to add self or not-self to it, you're plastering Nibbāna with urine and excrement—that's what you're doing…

There are discussions in the media concerning the Buddha's teachings on the issue of Nibbāna, so people have come to ask whether Nibbāna is self or not-self. That's the question.

Nibbāna is Nibbāna. That's the answer. In the texts they tell us: The paths are four, the fruitions are four, and Nibbāna is one. The four paths are the paths to stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, and Arahantship. The four fruitions are the fruitions of stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, and Arahantship. Then Nibbāna is one—in other words, it lies beyond those eight levels. There's only one Nibbāna. There's never been anything two about it. It's never been two with self, or three with not-self. Nibbāna is Nibbāna. Self and not-self are simply the path we follow for the sake of Nibbāna. They themselves can't be Nibbāna.

If you're going to contemplate for the sake of reaching Nibbāna, you have to follow the path of the Three Characteristics. In other words, you have to contemplate stress, inconstancy, not-self, and self. "Self" is the heap where all the defilements hide out. You have to remove all senses of self before the mind can gain the release of Nibbāna. So Nibbāna is Nibbāna, and nothing else. It can't be either

self or not-self—because issues of self and not-self are the path we follow for the sake of Nibbāna.

It's like climbing the stairs up to our house: the first step, the second step, all the way up to the last step of the stairs. Then we step into the house. Once you're in the house, the stairs are the stairs, and the house is the house. You can't say that the stairs and the house are one and the same thing. The same holds true with "self" and the Three Characteristics. They're the stairs that lead us to the paths, fruitions, and Nibbāna. When you've gotten past them and let them go, the mind enters Nibbāna—in the same way as when we've entered the house, we're no longer concerned with the stairs. The stairs don't turn into the house, and the house doesn't turn into the stairs. The house is the house, and the stairs are the stairs.

In the same way, "self" and the Three Characteristics are the stairs that lead us to the paths, fruitions, and Nibbāna. They can't be Nibbāna. This is why we say Nibbāna is Nibbāna. There's only one Nibbāna. It's not two with any sense of self you would try to add onto it. As for not-self, it's the path we follow. It can't be Nibbāna…

Once you've contemplated inconstancy, stress, self, and not-self through and through, and from every angle, the mind lets go of them and shoots straight to a purity filling the heart. You can call that Nibbāna or not as you like, for when you've reached that level there's no more issue about what you call it. You've gotten past the stairs and are in the house…

If you don't practice, if you simply bring out the printed page to argue about, you can argue from dawn until dusk and yet not come to an end. It's the same as when you study the Dhamma, from the beginning to Nibbāna. When you read about evil, you have doubts about evil. When you read about merit, you have doubts about merit. When you read about hell, you have doubts about hell. When you read about heaven, you have doubts about heaven. No matter how

far you read—to the land of the hungry ghosts, the levels of the *brahmas,* or all the way to Nibbāna—you have doubts about what you read. When you read about Nibbāna, you set up a boxing ring and fight with Nibbāna: "Does Nibbāna really exist or not?" And then you let your defilements wipe everything out, saying that Nibbāna doesn't exist.

In wiping everything out, they tell us that merit and evil, heaven and hell, none of these things exist. The defilements wipe us all out, because we have nothing but the names for merit, evil, heaven, hell, and Nibbāna. We don't have the truth of these things in charge of the heart, and as a result we can't overcome our doubts.

But when you practice, then where merit exists and where it doesn't exist: This is something you'll know in the heart. Where evil exists and where it doesn't exist: This will appear in the heart, for the nature of the heart is to know. The same holds true for heaven, hell, the *brahmā* worlds, and Nibbāna: These things will come flashing up in the heart, so that all your doubts will be ended. This is genuine knowledge, not the sort of stuff you memorize from books and then can argue about without end. When you practice, you actually meet up with these things, step by step—in the same way that all of you have come here, a place that some of you have never been to before, a place whose pictures you've painted in your imagination, thinking, "It's probably like that. It's probably like this." But once you've reached here, your doubts are ended, right? Look around you, and you can see what it's actually like.

It's the same when you follow the paths and fruitions, and reach Nibbāna. What concentration is like, what discernment is like, what release is like, what merit and evil, heaven and hell are like, will all come flashing clearly into the heart and put an end to your doubts. You won't have to ask the Buddha or anyone else, for what you see is the same as what he saw. Just as when we come to this meeting hall:

We're all in the same hall, we see the same hall, so why would we ask one another what the hall is like? So it is when you reach the paths, fruitions, and Nibbāna: you don't have to ask anyone else…

Glossary

Ācariya Teacher; mentor.

Anattā Not-self. One of the three characteristics or three perceptions to be applied to all phenomena to induce a sense of dispassion for them. Like the other two—*anicca* (inconstant) and *dukkha* (stressful)—*anattā* is applied to all fabricated phenomena.

Anicca Inconstant.

Arahant A liberated person; an Accomplished One; One who is fully awakened; the final stage of the noble path.

Ariya Noble; Noble One.

Ariya-dhana Noble wealth; inner riches: qualities that serve as capital in the quest for liberation: conviction, virtue, shame, compunction, breadth of learning, generosity, and discernment.

Ariya-sacca Noble truth; specifically the Four Noble Truths: stress, the origination of stress, the cessation of stress, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress.

Ariya puggala A Noble One; a supreme person; one who has attained any of the four transcendent paths or Stream-entry, Once-returning, Non-returning, or Arahantship.

Arūpa	Formless.
Arūpa-jhāna	Meditative absorption in a formless mental notion or state.
Āsava	Effluent, fermentation, or outflow. *Āsavas* are the defilements that 'flow out' from the heart into thoughts, speech, and action. Sometimes these are listed as three—sensual desire, becoming, and ignorance—and sometimes as four, with views added to the other three.
Avijjā	Fundamental ignorance; delusion about the nature of the mind. *Avijjā* is the lack of any knowledge that is higher than the level of mere convention, or lack of insight. It is ignorance so profound that it is self-obscuring. Turning everything upside down, it makes us believe that what is wrong is right, what is unimportant is important, what is bad is good. Ignorance here does not indicate a lack of knowledge but rather a lack of knowing, or knowing wrongly. *Avijjā* is the final fetter to be overcome and transcended to realize awakening.
Brahmās	A class of deities inhabiting the heavens of form or formlessness.
Buddho	Awake; one who has attained awakening.
Dhamma	Phenomenon; event; reality; the way things are in and of themselves; the basic principles which underlie their behavior. *Dhamma* is used also to refer to the teachings of the Buddha.
Dhammā(s)	In the plural, this means objects of mind, concepts, theories, phenomena.
Dukkha	Suffering; stress; pain; discontent. In the context of the three characteristics, this refers to the stressful nature of all things fabricated and conditioned by causes. In the context of the four noble truths, this refers to the mental stress and suffering that comes from craving and ignorance *(avijjā)*.
Kamma	Intentional act of body, speech, or mind that results in becoming and birth.
Khandha	Heap; group; aggregate; physical and mental components of experience from which the mind creates a sense of self. Altogether, there are five: form, feeling, perception, thought-formations and consciousness.

Kilesa Defilement. Mental qualities that soil, stain or defile the heart. The usual list includes greed, aversion and delusion in their various forms: passion, hypocrisy, arrogance, envy, conceit, vanity, pride, stinginess, worry, stubbornness, complacency, laziness, restlessness, shamelessness, and all sorts of more subtle variations that tend toward the production of unskillful states of mind.

Magga Path. Usually referring to the eightfold path leading to *Nibbāna.* When used in the combination of *magga, phala,* and *Nibbāna* then it means the four transcendent paths—or rather, one path with four levels of refinement. These are the path to Stream-entry (entering the stream to *Nibbāna,* which ensures that one will be reborn at most only seven more times), the path to Once-returning, the path to Non-returning, and the path to Arahantship.

Nibbāna Liberation; the unbinding of the mind from mental effluents (see *āsava*) and the ten fetters that bind it to the round of rebirth. Because this term is used to refer also to the extinguishing of fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling and peace. (According to the physics taught at the time of the Buddha, a burning fire seizes or adheres to its fuel; when extinguished, it is unbound). *Nibbāna* is the ultimate goal of Buddhist training.

Nirodha Cessation of *dukkha,* coming from the abandoning of craving and ignorance.

Pāli The canon of the Buddhist texts and the ancient language in which it is written.

Parāmāsa Fondling; touching; handling; adherence; grasping.

Pāṭimokkha The code of monastic rules; the 227 rules for Buddhist monks that are usually recited every fortnight.

Phala Fruition. Specifically, the fruition of any of the four transcendent paths (see *magga*).

Puñña Inner quality; inner worth; merit.

Rūpa Form (visible object); bodily form; all material form, whether gross or subtle. The first *khandha.*

Rūpa-jhāna	Meditative absorption in a single mental form or image.
Sacca	Truth; true, real.
Samudaya	Origin; arising; origination. *Samudaya-sacca* is the truth of the cause of suffering: craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, and craving for non-becoming.
Sangha	The community of the Buddha's disciples. On the conventional level, this refers to the Buddhist monastic order. On the ideal level, it refers to those of the Buddha's followers, whether lay or ordained, who have attained at least the first of the four stages (see *ariya*) culminating in Arahantship.
Sankhāra	Fabrication; condition. As a blanket term, this refers to all forces that fabricate or condition things in nature, and to the fabricated or conditioned things that result. As the fourth *khandha,* it refers to thought-constructs in the mind.
Saññā	Perception; the act of labeling or naming phenomena. The third *khandha,* perception recognizes what appears to consciousness, giving it meaning and significance.
Sīlabbata	Habits and practices.
Vedanā	Feeling; the sensation of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain. The second *khandha.*
Viññāṇa	Consciousness; the act of taking note of sense data as they occur. The fifth *khandha.*
Vipāka	Result, fruition, consequence of one's action.
Vipassanā	Liberating insight that arises from the practice of concentration.

Published by:

Forest Dhamma Monastery
255 Snakefoot Lane
Lexington, VA 24450
USA
www.forestdhamma.org



I am going to describe the gathering place of all things—goodness and evil, happiness and suffering—so that you'll know exactly where they all converge. Tune in your receivers well and you'll come to know that everything converges at the heart. Darkness and brightness lie here. Ignorance and delusion, knowledge and wisdom all lie here in the heart. Techniques for training the heart to develop every form of goodness and virtue are meant to rid the heart of the things that cloud and stain it.

A Forest Dhamma Publication